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AGNES SOREL,

An Historical Romance.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "THE FATE," "THE WOODMAN," "REVENGE,"
"THE FORGERY," "PEQUINILLO," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO

MAUNSELL B. FIELD, Esq.

Not only as the companion of some of my literary labours but as my dear friend; not only as a gentleman and a man of honour, but as a man of genius and of feeling: not only as one who does honor to his own country, but as one who would do honor to any.

THIS BOOK

IS DEDICATED

WITH SINCERE REGARD

BY

G. P. R. JAMES.

PREFACE.

How strange the sensation would be, how marvellously interesting the scene, were we to wake up from some quiet night's rest, and find ourselves suddenly transported four or five hundred years back, living and moving amongst the men of a former age!

To pass from the British fortress of Gibraltar, with drums and fifes, red coats and bayonets, in a few hours to the Coast of Africa, and find oneself surrounded by Moors and male petticoats, turbans and scymitars, is the greatest transition the world affords at present; but it is nothing to that of which I speak. How marvellously interesting would it be also, not only to find oneself brought into close con-

tact with customs, manners, and characteristics of a former age, with all our modern notions strong about us, but to be met, at every turn, by thoughts, feelings, views, principles, springing out of a totally different state of society, which have all passed away, and mouldered, like the garments in which, at that time, men decorated themselves.

Such, however, is the leap which I wish the reader to take at the present moment; and, although I know it to be impossible for him to divest himself of all those modern impressions which are a part of his identity, to place himself with me in the midst of a former period, and to see himself surrounded, for a brief space, with the people, and the things, and the thoughts of the fifteenth century.

Let me premise, however, that the object of an author in the minute detail of local scenery, and ancient customs, which he is sometimes compelled to give, and which are often objected to by the animals with long ears that browse on the borders of Parnassus, is not so much to show his own antiquarian lore, as to imbue his reader with such thoughts and feelings as may enable him to comprehend the motives of the persons acting before his eyes, and the sensations, passions, and prejudices of

ages passed away. Were we to take an unsophisticated rustic, and boldly tell him, without any previous intimation of the habits of the time, that the son of a King of England one day went out alone—or at best with a little boy in his company—all covered over with iron—that he betook himself to a lone and desolate pass in the mountains, traversed by a high road, and sat upon horseback by the hour together, with a spear in his hand, challenging everybody who passed to fight him, the unsophisticated rustic would naturally conclude that the King's son was mad, and would expect to hear of him next in Bedlam, rather than on the throne of England.

But let any one tell him previously of the habits, manners, and customs of those days, and the rustic may very well believe that the whole age was mad; he will, nevertheless, understand and appreciate the motives of the individual, saying to himself—"This man was not a bit madder than the rest."

This book, however, is not intended to be a mere painting of the customs of the fifteenth century, but rather a picture of certain characters of that period, dressed in the garb of the times, and moved by all those springs of action which influenced men

in the age to which I refer. It has been said, and justly, that human nature is the same in all ages; but, as a musical instrument will produce many different tones, according to the hand which touches it, so will human nature present many different aspects, according to the influences by which it is affected.

At all events, I claim a right to play my own tune upon my own violin; and what matters it, if that tune be an air of the olden times? No one need listen who does not like it.

AGNES SOREL.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a small, square room, of a very plain, unostentatious appearance, in the turret of a tall house in the city of Paris. The walls were of hewn stone, without any decoration whatever, except, where at the four sides—and nearly in the centre of each—appeared a long iron arm, or branch, with a socket at the end of it, curved and twisted in a somewhat elaborate manner, and bearing some traces of having

been gilt in a former day. The ceiling was much more decorated than the walls, and was formed by two groined arches of stone-work, crossing each other in the middle, and thus forming, as it were, four pointed arches; the intervals between one mass of stone-work and another being filled up with dark-colored oak, much after the fashion of a cap in a coronet. The spot where the arches crossed, was ornamented with a richly carved pendant or corbel, in the centre of which was embedded a massive iron hook, probably intended to sustain a large lamp, while the iron sockets protruding from the walls were destined for flambeaux or lanterns.

The floor was of stone, and a rude mat of rushes was spread over about one eighth of the surface towards the middle of the room, where stood a table of no very large dimensions, covered with a great pile of papers, and a few books. No lamp hung from the ceiling: no lantern or flambeau cast its light from the walls,

as had undoubtedly been the case in earlier times: the tall, quaint-shaped window, besides being incumbered by a rich tracery of stone-work, could not admit even the moon-beams through the thick coat of dust that covered its panes; and the only light which that room received was afforded by a dull, oil lamp upon the table, without glass or shade.

All the furniture seemed dry, and withered, and, though solid enough, being bulkily formed of dark oak, presented no ornament whatever. It was, in short, an uncomfortable looking apartment enough, having a ruinous and dilapidated appearance, without any of the picturesqueness of decay.

Under the table lay a large, brindled, rough-haired dog, of the stag-hound breed, but cruelly docked of his tail, in accordance with some code of forest laws, which at that time were very numerous, and very various in different parts of France, but all equally unjust and severe. Apparently he was sound asleep as dog could

be; but we all know that a dog's sleep is not as profound as a metaphysician's dream; and from time to time he would raise his head a little from his crossed paws, and look slightly up towards the legs of a person seated at the table.

Now those legs—to begin at the unusual end of a portrait—were exceedingly handsome, well-shaped legs indeed, evidently appertaining to a young man on the flowery side of maturity. There was none of the delicate, rather unsymmetrical straightness of the mere boy about them, nor the over-stout ballustrade-like contour of the sturdy man of middle age. Nor did the rest of the figure belie their promise; for it was in all respects a good one, though somewhat lightly formed, except the shoulders, iudeed, which were broad and powerful, and the chest which was wide and expansive. The face was good, though not strictly handsome, and the expression was frank and bright; yet with a certain air of steady determination in it,

which is generally conferred by the experience of more numerous years than seemed to have passed over that young and unwrinkled brow.

The dress of the young scribe—for he was writing busily—was in itself plain, though not without evident traces of care and attention in its device and adjustment. The shoes were extravagantly long, and drawn out to a very acute point, and the grey sort of mantle, with short sleves, which he wore over his ordinary hose and jerkin, had at the collar, and at the end of those short sleeves, a little strip of fur—a mark possibly of gentle birth; for sumptuary laws—always ineffectual—were issued from time to time, during all the earlier periods of the French monarchy, and generally broken as soon as issued.

There was no trace of a beard upon the chin. The upper lip itself was destitute of the manly moustache; and the hair, combed back from the forehead, and lying in smooth and glossy curls upon the back of the neck, gave an appearance

almost feminine to the head, which was beautifully set upon the shoulders. The broad chest already mentioned, however, the long sinewy arms, and the strong brown hand which held the pen, forbade all suspicion that the young writer was a fair lady in disguise, although that was a period in the world's history when the dames of France were not over scrupulous in assuming any character which might suit their purposes at the time.

There was a good deal of noise and bustle in the streets of Paris, as men, with *flambeaux* in their hands, walked on before some great lord of the Court, calling—"Place! Place!" to clear the way for their master as he passed; or as a merry party of the citizens returned laughing and jesting from some gay meeting; or, as a group of night-ramblers walked along insulting the ear of night with cries, and often with blasphemies; or, as lays and songs were trolled up from the corners of the streets by knots of persons, who, probably destitute of any

other home, had assembled round the large bonfires, lighted to give warmth to the shivering poor—for it was the winter of the great frost of one thousand four hundred and seven, and the miseries of the land were overpowering.

Still, the predominant sounds were those of joy and revelry; for the people of Paris were the same in those days that they are even now; and joy, festivity, and frolic, then, as in our time, rolled and carolled along the high-ways, while the dust was yet wet with blood, and while wretchedness, destitution, and oppression lurked unseen behind the walls.

No sounds, however, seemed to disturb the lad at his task, or to withdraw his thoughts, for one moment, from the subject before him. Now a loud peal of laughter shook the casement; but still he wrote on: now a cry, as if of pain, rang round the room from without; but such cries were common in those days, and he lifted not his head. And then, again, a plaintive song floated on the air, broken only

by the striking of a clock, jarring discordantly with the melodious notes of the air. Still the pen hurried rapidly over the page, till some minutes after the hour of nine had struck, when the writer laid it down with a deep respiration, as if some allotted task were ended.

At length, the dog, which was lying at his feet, lifted his head suddenly, and gazed towards the door. The youth was reading over what he had written, and caught no sound to withdraw his attention; but the beast was right. There was a step—a familiar step—upon the stair-case; and the good dog rose up, and walked towards the entrance of the room just as the door was opened, and another personage entered upon the scene.

He was a grave man, of the middle age, tall, well-formed, and of a noble, and commanding presence. He was dressed principally in black velvet, with a gown of that stuff, which was lined with fur, indeed, though none of that lining was shown externally. On his head he

had a small velvet cap, without any feather, and his hair was somewhat sprinkled with grey, though, in all probability, he had not passed the age of forty.

"Well, Jean," he said, in a deliberate tone, as he entered the room with a firm and quiet tread. "How many have you done, my son?"

"All of them, sir," replied the young man. "I was just reading over this last letter to Signor Bernardo Baldi, to see that I had made no mistake."

"You never mistake, Jean," said the elder man, in a kindly tone, and then added, thoughtfully—"All! You must have written hard and diligently."

"You told me to have them ready against you returned, sir," said the youth.

"Yes; but I have returned an hour before the time," rejoined his elder companion.

And then, as the young man moved away from the chair which he had occupied, in order

to leave it vacant for his visitor, the latter drew near the table, and, still standing, glanced his eye over some six or seven letters which lay freshly written, and yet unfolded. It was evident, however, that though, by a process not uncommon, the mind might take in, and even investigate, to a certain degree, all that the eye rested upon, a large part of the thoughts were engaged with other subjects, and that deeper interests divided the attention of the reader.

"There should be a comma there," he said, pointing with his finger, and, at the same time, seating himself in the chair.

The young man took the letter, and added the comma; but when he looked up, his companion's eyes were fixed upon the matting on the floor, and it was apparent that the letters, and all they contained, had passed away from his memory.

The dog rose from the couchant attitude in which he had placed himself, and laid his shaggy

head upon the elder man's knee; who, patting him quietly, said, in a meditative tone—

"It is pleasant to have some one we can trust. Don't you think so, Jean?"

"It is indeed, sir," replied the young man; "and pleasant to be trusted."

"And yet we sometimes must part with those we trust most," continued the other. "It is sad; but, sometimes, it is necessary."

The young man's countenance fell a little; but he made no reply; and the other, looking towards the wide fire-place, said—

"You have let the fire go out, Jean; and these are not days in which one can afford to be without warmth."

The young man gathered the embers together, threw on some logs of wood, and both he and his companion mused for several minutes without speaking a word.

At length, the youth seemed to summon sudden courage, and said, abruptly—

"I hope you are not thinking of parting

with *me*, sir. I have endeavoured to the utmost to do my duty towards you, and you never had occasion to find fault—though, perhaps, your kindness may have prevented you from doing so, even when there was occasion."

"Not so—not so, my son," replied the other, warmly. "There has been no fault, and consequently no blame. Nay, more; I promised you, if you fulfilled all the tasks I set you, never to part with you but for your own advantage. The time has come, however, when it is necessary to part with you, and I must do so for your own sake."

A dead silence ensued for a moment or two; and then the elder man laid his finger quietly on the narrow strip of fur that bordered his companion's dress, saying with a slight smile,

"You are of noble blood, Jean; and I am a mere bourgeois."

"I can easily strip that off, if it offends you,

sir," replied the young man, giving him back his smile. "It is soon done away."

"But not the noble blood, Jean," answered his companion; "and this occupation is not fitted for you."

An air of deep and anxious grief spread over the young man's face, and he answered, earnestly,

"There is nothing derogatory in it, sir. To write your letters, to transact any honourable business, which you may entrust to me, cannot, in any way, degrade me; and you know right well, that it was from no base or ignoble motive, that I undertook the task. My mother's poverty is no stain upon our honourable blood, nor, surely, can her son's efforts be so to change that poverty into competence."

His companion smiled upon him kindly, saying,

"Far from it, Jean; but still, if there be an opportunity of your effecting your object in a course more consonant with your birth and

station, it is my duty, as your friend, to seize it for you. Such an opportunity now presents itself, and you must take advantage of it. It may turn out well—I trust it will; but should the reverse be the case—for, in these strange, unsettled times, those who stand highest have the most to fear a fall—if the reverse should be the case, I say, you will always find a resource in Jacques Cœur: his house, his purse, his confidence, will be always open to you. Put on your *chaperon*, then, and come with me; for Fortune, like Time, should always be taken by the forelock. The jade is sure to kick if we get behind her."

The young man took down one of the large hoods, in which it was still customary for the bourgeoisie, especially, to envelope their heads when walking in the streets of Paris. Beneath it, however, he placed a small cap, fitting merely the crown of the head, and over the sort of tunic which he wore, he cast a long mantle; for the weather was very cold. When

fully accoutred, he ventured to ask where Maitre Cœur was going to take him; but the good merchant answered with a smile,

"Never mind, my son—never mind. If we succeed, as I expect, you will soon know. If not, there is no need you should. Come with me, Jean; and trust to me."

"Right willingly," replied the young man, and followed him.

The house was a large and handsome house, as things went at that time in Paris; but the staircase was merely one of those narrow, twisting spirals, which we rarely see, except in Cathedrals or ruined castles, in the present times. Windows there were none; and in the day the manifold steps received light only through a loop-hole here and there; for, in those days, it was not at all inconvenient for the owner, even of a very modest mansion, to have the means of ascending and descending from one part of his house to the other, without the danger of being struck by the arrows

which were flying somewhat too frequently in the streets of Paris. At night, a lantern, guarded by plates of horn from the cold blasts through the loop-holes, shed a faint and twinkling ray, at intervals of ten or twelve yards, upon the innumerable steps.

But Jacques Cœur and his young companion were both well acquainted with the way, and were soon at the little door which opened into the court-yard. Jean Charost looked round for the merchant's mule, as they issued forth; but no mule was there, nor any attendant in waiting; and Jacques Cœur, drawing his cloak more tightly round him, walked straight out of the gates, and along the narrow street, unlighted by anything but the pale stars shining dimly in the wintry sky.

The merchant walked fast; and Jean Charost followed a step behind: not without some curiosity: not without some of that palpitating anxiety, which, with the young, generally precedes an unexpected change of life; yet

with a degree of, at least, external calmness, which nothing but very early discipline in the hard school of the world could give. It seemed to him, indeed, that his companion intended to traverse the whole city of Paris; for directing his course towards the quarter of St. Antoine, he paused not for some twenty minutes, except upon one occasion, when, just as they were entering one of the principal streets, half-a-dozen men, carrying torches, came rapidly along, followed by two or three on horseback, and several on foot. Jacques Cœur drew back into the shadow, and brought his cloak closer round him; but the moment the cavalcade had passed, he walked on again, saying, in a whisper:

"That is the Marquis de Giac, a favourite of the Duke of Burgundy—or rather the husband of the Duke's favourite. He owes me a thousand crowns; and consequently loves not to see me in his way."

Five minutes more brought them to a large

stone wall, having two towers, almost like those of a church, one at either end, and a great gate, with a wicket near the centre. Monasteries were more common than bee-hives in Paris in those days, and Jean Charost would have taken no notice of the wall of a large, dull-looking building rising up behind him, had it not been that a tall man, clad apparently in a long, grey gown, rushed suddenly up to the gate, just as the two were passing, and rang the bell violently. He seemed to hold something carefully on his left arm; but his air was wild and hurried, and Jacques Cœur murmured, as they passed:

"Alas, alas! 'tis still the same, all over the world!"

Jean Charost did not venture to ask the meaning of his comment; but looked up, and marked the building well, following still upon the merchant's rapid steps; and, a short distance farther on, the great towers of the Bastile

came in sight, looking over the lesser buildings in the front.

Before they reached the open space around the fortress, however, the street expanded considerably, and at its widest point, to the left, appeared a large and massive edifice, surrounded by walls of heavy masonry, battlemented and machicolated with four small flanking towers at the corners. In the centre of this wall, as in the case of the monastery, was a large gate-way; but the aspect of this entrance was very different from that of the entrance to the religious building. Here, was an archway with battlements above, and windows in the masonry looking out on the street. A parapetted gallery, too, of stone-work, from which a porter, or warder could speak with any one applying for admission, without opening the gate, ran along just above the arch.

No great precautions, however, seemed to be in force at the moment of Jacques Cœur's approach. The gate was open, though not un-

guarded; for two men, partly armed, were lolling at the entrance, notwithstanding the coldness of the night. Behind the massive chains, too, which ran along the whole front line of the wall, solidly rivetted into strong stone posts, cutting off a path of about five feet in width from the street, were eight or nine men and young lads, some well armed, almost as if for war, and some dressed in gay and glittering apparel of a softer texture. The night, as I have said, was, in sooth, very cold; yet the air before the building received some artificial warmth from a long line of torches, blazing high in iron sockets projecting from the walls, which looked grim and frowning in the glare.

At the gates Jacques Cœur stopped short, and let his mantle fall a little, so as to show his face. One of the men under the arch stared at him, and took a step forward, as if to enquire his business; but the other nodded his head, saying:

"Good evening again, Maitre Jacques. Pass in. You will find Guillot at the door."

"Come, Jean," said Jacques Cœur, turning to his young companion.

Passing under the arch, they entered a small piece of ground, laid out apparently as a garden; for the light of a lantern, scattered here and there, showed a number of trees planted evenly, in the midst of which rose a palace of a much lighter and more graceful style of architecture than the stern, heavy-looking defences on the street could have induced any one to expect. A flight of steps led up from the garden to a deep sort of open entrance-hall, where a light was burning, showing a door of no very great size, surrounded with innumerable delicate mouldings of stone. To the door was fastened, by a chain, a large, heavy, iron ring, deeply notched all along the internal circle; and by its side hung a small bar of steel, which, when passed rapidly over these notches, produced a loud sound not altogether unmusical.

To this instrument, Jacques Cœur applied himself, and the door was immediately opened from within.

"Come in, Maitre Jacques," said a man of almost gigantic height. "Come in; the Duke is waiting for you in the little hall."

CHAPTER II.

PASSING through a small and narrow hall, Jacques Cœur and his companion ascended a flight of six or seven steps, and then entered, by a door larger than that which communicated with the garden, a vestibule of very splendid proportions.

It must be remembered that the arts were at that time just at the period of their second birth in Europe; the famous fifteenth century had just begun, and a true taste for the beautiful, in every thing except architecture, was

confined to the breasts of a few. Cimabue, Giotto, Hubert Van Eyk, and John of Bruges, had already appeared; but the days of Leonardo, of Raphael, of Michael Angelo, of Giorgione, and of Correggio, were still to come. Nevertheless, the taste for painting and sculpture was rapidly extending in all countries, and especially in France, which, though it has not given birth to many great painters, and to scarcely a first-rate sculptor, had always an admiration of that which is fine, when produced by others.

It was with astonishment and delight, then, that Jean Charost, who had never in his life before seen anything that deserved the name of a painting, except a fresco here and there, and the miniature illuminations of missals and psalm-books, beheld the vestibule surrounded on every side with pictures which appeared to him perfection itself, and which probably would have even presented to our eyes many points of excellence, unattained or unattainable by our

own contemporaries. Though the apartment was well lighted, he had no time to examine the treasures it contained; for Jacques Cœur, more accustomed to such scenes himself, and with his mind fully occupied by other thoughts, hurried straight across to a wide, two-winged stair-case of black oak, at the further end of the vestibule, and ascended the steps at a rapid rate.

The young man followed through a long corridor, plainly furnished, till his guide stopped, and knocked at a door on the right-hand side. A voice from within exclaimed, "Come in!" and when Jacques Cœur opened the door, Jean Charost found himself at the entrance of a room, and in the presence of a person, requiring some description.

The little hall, as it was called, was a large vaulted chamber, about forty feet in length, and probably twenty-six or twenty-eight in width. It was entirely lined with dark-colored wood; and the pointed arch of the roof, really, or

apparently supported by highly ornamented wood-work, was of the same material. All along the walls, however, upheld by rings depending from long arms of silver, were wide sheets of tapestry of an ancient date, but still full of brilliant colors; and projecting from between these, at about six feet from the ground, were a number of other silver brackets, supporting sconces of the same metal. Large, straight-backed chairs were arranged along the walls, touching the tapestry; but there was only one table in the room, on which stood a large *candélâbre* of two branches, each supporting a wax taper or candle, not much inferior in size to those set upon the altar by Roman Catholics, and by persons who repudiate the name, but follow the practices, of Rome—the mongrel breed, who have not the courage to confess themselves renegade, yet have turned tail upon their former faith, and the faith of their ancestors.

At this table was seated, with paper and pen

and ink before him, not unemployed even at that moment, a man of the middle age, of a very striking and interesting appearance. As none of the sconces were lighted, and the *candélâbre* before him afforded the only light which the room received, he sat in the midst of a bright spot, surrounded almost by darkness, and, though heaven knows, no saint, looking like the picture of a saint in glory. His face and figure might well have afforded a subject for the pencil; for not only was he handsome in feature and in form, but there was an indiscribable charm of expression in his countenance, and a marvellous grace in his person which characterized both, even when in profound repose.

We are too apt to confine the idea of grace to action. It is a mistaken notion that grace does not exist in perfect rest. Perhaps, never is it at its perfection, except in repose. Witness a sleeping child. Witness the Venus de Medici. Witness the Sappho of Dannecker. At all

other times it is evanescent, shifting, and changing, like the streamers of the Aurora Borealis; but in stillness, thought can dwell upon it: the mind can take it in, read it, and ponder upon its innate meaning, as upon the page of some ever-living book, and not the mere hasty word spoken by some passing stranger.

The man, as already said, was writing busily; and apparently had uttered the words—"Come in," without looking up. But, the moment after Jacques Cœur and his young companion had entered, the prince—for he could be nothing else than a prince, let republicans say what they will—lifted his speaking eyes, and looked forward.

"Ah, my friend," he said, seeing the great merchant, "come hither. I have been anxiously waiting for you."

Jacques Cœur advanced to within a few paces, while the other still kept his seat, and Jean Charost followed a step or two behind.

"Well, what news do you bring me?" asked the prince, lowering his tone a little. "Good, I hope. Come, say you have changed your resolution! Why should a merchant's resolutions be made of sterner stuff than woman's, or the moon's, or man's, or any other of the light things that inhabit this earth, or whirl around it? Faith, my good friend, the most beneficent of things are always changing. If the sun himself stuck obstinately to one point, we should be scorched by summer heat, and blinded by too much light. But come, come; to speak seriously, this is absolutely needful to me. You are a friend—a good friend—a well-wisher to your country, and to myself. Say you have changed your mind."

All this time, he had continued seated, while Jacques Cœur, without losing any of that dignity of carriage which distinguished him, stood near, with his velvet cap in his hand, and an air of respect and deference.

"I have told your Highness," he replied,

bowing his head reverently, "that I cannot do it—that it is impossible."

The other started up from the table with some impetuosity.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "What! would you have me believe that you, reputed the most wealthy merchant of all these realms, cannot yourself, or amongst your friends, raise the small sum I require in a moment of great need? No, no. Say rather that your love for Louis of Orleans has grown cold, or that you doubt his powers of repaying you—that you think fortune is against him—that you believe there is a destiny that domineers over his. But say not that it is impossible."

"My Lord Duke, I repeat," replied Jacques Cœur, in a tone which had a touch of sorrow in it, "I repeat, that it is impossible: not that my affection for your service has grown cold: not that I believe the destiny of any one in these realms can domineer over that of the brother of my king: not that I have not the

money, or could not obtain it in Paris in an hour. Nay more, I will own I have it, as by your somewhat unkind words, mighty Prince, you drive me to tell you how it is impossible. I would have fain kept my reasons in respectful silence; but, perhapr, after all, those reasons may be better to you than my gold."

"Odds life, but not so substantial," replied the Duke of Orleans, with a smile, seating himself again, and adding—"Speak on, speak on; for if we cannot have one good thing, it is well to have another; and I know your reasons are always excellent, Maitre Jacques."

"Suppose, my Lord," replied Jaques Cœur, "that this wealth of mine is bound up in iron chests, with locks of double proof, and that I have lost the key?"

"Heaven's Queen! send for a blacksmith, and dash the chests to pieces," said the Duke of Orleans, with a laugh.

"Such, perhaps, is the way His Highness of Burgundy would deal with them," replied

Jacques Cœur; "but you, sir, think differently, I believe. But let me explain to you, that the chests—these iron chests—are conscience; the locks, faith and loyalty; the only key that can open them, conviction. But to leave all allegories, my Lord Duke; I tell your Highness frankly, that were you to ask this sum for your own private need, my love and affection to your person would bid me throw my fortune wide before you, and say—'Take what you will!' But when you tell me, and I know, that your object is, with this same wealth of mine, to levy war in this kingdom, and tear the land with the strife of faction, I tell you I have not the key, and say it is impossible—I say it is impossible for me, with my convictions, to let you have this money for such purposes."

"Now, look you here," cried the Duke of Orleans. "How these good men will judge of matters that they know not, and deal with things beyond their competence! Here, my good friend, you erect yourself into a judge of

my plans, my purposes, and their results; you at once testify against me, and pronounce the judgment."

"Nay, my good Lord, not so," replied Jacques Cœur. "You ask me to do a thing depending on myself; and many a man would call various considerations to counsel, before he said yea, or nay—would ask himself, whether it was convenient—whether there was a likelihood of gain—whether there was a likelihood of loss—whether it affected your side, or that of Burgundy. Now, so help me Heaven, not one of these considerations has weighed with me for a moment. I have asked myself but one question—'Is this for the good of my country? Is it for the service of my king?' Your Highness laughs; but it is true, and the answer has been—'No.'"

"Jacques Cœur, thou art a good and honest man," returned the Duke, laying his hand upon the other's sleeve, and looking in his face gravely. "But you drive me to give you ex-

planations, which I think, as my friend and favorer, you might have spared. The spendthrift gives such explanations, summonses plausible excuses, and tells a canting tale of how he came in such a strait, when he goes to borrow money of an usurer; but, methinks, such things should have no place between Louis of Orleans, the king's only brother, and his friend, Jacques Cœur."

"Ah, noble Prince!" cried the merchant, very much touched. But the Duke did not attend to his words, and, rising from his seat, threw back his fine and stately head, saying,

"The explanation shall be given, however. I seek not one *denier* of this money for myself. My revenues are ample; more than ample for my wishes. My court is a very humble one, compared with that of Burgundy. But I seek this sum to enable me to avert dangers from France, which I see coming up speedily, like

storms upon the wind. I need not tell you, Jacques Cœur, my brother's unhappy state; nor how he, who has ever possessed and merited the love of all his subjects, is, with rare intervals, unconscious of his kingly duties. The hand of God has taken from him, during the greater part of life, the power of wielding the sceptre which it placed within his grasp."

"I know it well, your highness," replied the merchant.

"His children are all young, Jacques Cœur," continued the Duke, "and there are but two persons sufficiently near in blood, and eminent in station, to exercise the authority in the land which slips from the grasp of the monarch; namely, the Duke of Burgundy, and the Duke of Orleans. The one, though a peer of France, and a prince of its blood royal, holds possessions which render him in some sort a foreigner. Now, God forbid that I should speak ill of my noble cousin of Burgundy. But he is a man

of mighty power, and not without ambition—honorable, doubtless; but still, high-handed and grasping. Burgundy and Flanders, with many a fair territory besides, make up an almost kingly state; and I would ask you yourself, if he does not well nigh rule in France likewise. Hear me out, hear me out. You would say that he has a right to some influence here; and so he has. But I would have this '*well nigh*' not '*quite.*' I pledge you my word that my sole object is, to raise up such a power as to awe my good cousin from too great and too dangerous enterprises. Were it a question of mere right, whose is the right to authority here till the king's children are of an age to act, but the king's brother? Were it a question of policy, on whom should the people rely, but on him whose whole interests are identified with this monarchy? Were it a question of judgment, who is so likely to protect, befriend, and direct aright, the children of

the king, as the uncle who has fostered their youth, and loved them ever as his own? There is not a man in all France who suspects me of wishing aught but their good. I fear not the Duke of Burgundy so much as to seek to banish him from all power and authority in the realm. But I only desire that his authority should have a counterpoise, in order that his power may never become dangerous. And now tell me, Jacques Cœur, whether my objects are such as you can honestly refuse to aid, remembering that I have used every effort, in a peaceful way, to induce my cousin of Burgundy to content hinself with a lawful and harmless share of influence."

"My Lord, I stand rebuked," replied Jacques Cœur. "But, if your Highness would permit me, I would humbly suggest that others might devise means to bring about the happy object you propose, which may have escaped your attention."

"Name them—name them," cried the Duke of Orleans, somewhat warmly. "By Heaven's Queen, I think I have adopted all that could be devised by mortal man. Name then, my good friend," he added, in a milder tone.

"Nay, royal sir," replied Jacques Cœur, "it is not for one so humble as myself to suggest any remedies in such a serious case; but I doubt not your relatives, the Dukes of Valençon and Berri, and the good King of Sicily, so near and dear to you, might, in their wisdom, aid you with advice, which would hold your honour secure, promote the pacification of the realm, and attain the great object that you have in view."

The Duke of Orleans made no reply; but walked once or twice up and down the hall, with his arms folded on his chest, apparently in deep thought. At length, however, he stopped before Jacques Cœur, and laid his finger on his breast, saying, in a grave and enquiring tone,

"What would men think of me, my friend, if Louis of Orleans, in a private quarrel with John of Burgundy, were to call in the soft counsels of Valençon, of Berri and Anjou? Would not men say that he was afraid?"

The slightest possible smile quivered, for an instant, on the lip of Jacques Cœur; but he replied, gravely and respectfully,

"First, I would remark, your Highness, that this is not a private quarrel, as I understand it, but a cause solely affecting the good of the realm."

The Duke of Orleans smiled also, with a gay, conscious, half detected smile; but Jacques Cœur proceeded uninterrupted, saying,

"Secondly, I should boldly answer, that men would dare to say nothing. The Prince, who boldly bearded Henry the Fourth of Lancaster, on his usurped throne, to do battle, hand to hand, in the hour of his utmost triumph and

success,* could never be supposed afraid of any mortal man. Believe me, my Lord, the thought of fear has never been, and never can

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* Jacques Cœur, it would seem, alluded to a fact not generally stated by English historians, which I may as well mention here, as a curious illustration of the habits of those times. After the death of the unhappy Richard the Second, when it was currently reported throughout Europe, that the successful usurper had put him to death in prison, the Duke of Orleans sent a cartel to Henry of Lancaster by the hands of Champagne, king-at-arms, and Orleans his herald, demanding a combat of one hundred noblemen of France, against one hundred of the Lancastrian party of England, the one party to be headed by the Duke, the other by the new King of England. He gave the choice of any place between Angouleme and Bourdeaux, and endeavoured earnestly to bring about the meeting. Henry, in his reply, evading the demand, takes exception to the titles which the Duke had given him, stands upon his dignity as King, and expresses great surprise that the Duke should call him to the field without having previously solemnly abjured an alliance contracted between them in the year 1316. To this the Duke of

be, joined with the name of Louis of Orleans."

"Ah, Jacques Cœur, Jacques Cœur," re-

Orleans tartly replied, in a letter full of pungent and bitter satire. Amongst other galling passages, is the following:—"And as to what you say, that no lord or knight, let his condition be what it will, ought to demand a combat, without renouncing his alliance, (with his adversary) I am not aware that you renounced, to your lord, the King Richard, your oath of fealty to him before you proceeded against his person in the manner which you have done." And again:—"As to what you write, that whatever a prince or king does, ought to be done for the honor of God, and for the common benefit of all Christendom, and his own kingdom, and not for vain glory, nor for any temporal cupidity, I reply, that you say well; but if you had so acted in your own country, in times past many things which you have done, would not have been perpetrated in the land in which you live." By such expressions he galled Henry the Fourth into an indefinite sort of acceptance of his challenge, though the English King would not condescend to name time or place. The letters are still extant, and are very curious.

plied the Prince, laughing, "art thou a flatterer too?"

"If so, an honest one, my Prince, "answered the merchant; "and, without daring to dictate terms to your Highness, let me add, that should you—thinking better of this case—employ the counsels of the noble Princes I have mentioned, and should their efforts prove unsuccessful, then, convinced that the last means for peace have been tried, and failed, I shall find my duty and my wishes reconciled, and the last *livre* that I have, should I beg my bread in the streets as a common mendicant, will be freely offered in your just cause."

There was a warmth, a truth, a sincerity, in the great merchant's words, that seemed to touch his noble auditor deeply. The Duke threw himself into his seat again, and covered his eyes for a moment or two; then, taking Jacques Cœur's hand, he pressed it warmly, saying—

"Thanks, my friend, thanks! I have urged

you somewhat hardly, perhaps; but I know you wish me well. I believe your advice is good: pride, vanity, whatever it is, shall be sacrificed. I will send for my noble cousins, and consult with them; and if the bloody and disastrous arbitrement of war can be avoided, it shall be so. Many may bless the man who stayed it; and although, in their ignorance, they may not add the name of Jacques Cœur to their prayers, there is a Being who has seen you step between Princes and their wrath, and who himself has said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers!'"

The Duke then leaned his head upon his hand, and fell into thought again.

All this time, while a somewhat long and interesting conversation had been taking place in his presence, Jean Charost had been standing a few steps behind Jacques Cœur, without moving a limb, and, in truth, so deeply interested in all that was passing, that he hardly ventured to draw a breath. The whole scene

was a lesson to him, however; a lesson never forgot. He saw the condescension and kindness, the familiar friendship, which the brother of the King of France displayed towards the simple merchant; but he saw also, that no familiarity induced Jacques Cœur, for one moment, to forget respect, or to abate one tittle of the reverence due to the Duke's station. He saw that it was possible to be bold and firm, even with a Royal personage, and yet to give him no cause of offence, if he were in heart as noble as in name.

Both the principal personages in the room, however, in the mighty interests involved in their discourse, seemed to have forgotten Jean's presence altogether—indeed, one of them, probably, had hardly even perceived him. But, at length, the Duke, waking up as it were from the thoughts which had absorbed him, with his resolution taken, and his course laid out, raised his eyes towards Jacques Cœur, as if intending to continue the conversation with

some farther announcement of his purposes. As he did so, he seemed suddenly to perceive the figure of Jean Charost, standing in the half-light behind; and he exclaimed, quickly and eagerly—

"Ha! who is that? who is that young man? whence came he? what wants he?"

Jacques Cœur started too; for he had totally forgotten the fact of his having brought Jean Charost there. For an instant he looked confused and agitated; but then recovered himself, and replied—

"This is the young gentleman whom I commended to your Highness's service. In the importance of the questions you first put to me, I totally forgot to present him to you."

The Duke gazed in the face of Jean Charost, as he advanced a step or two into the light, seeming to question his countenance closely; and for a moment a slight look of annoyance and anxiety was perceptible in his aspect,

which did not escape the eyes of Jacques Cœur.

"Sir, I have committed a great fault," he said, "but it might have been greater; for, although this young gentleman has heard all that we have said, I will answer for his faith, his honesty, and his discretion, with my life."

Before the words were uttered, however, the Duke of Orleans had recovered himself entirely; and, looking up frankly in Jacques Cœur's face, he answered—

"As far as I can recollect our conversation, my good friend, it contained not one word which either you or I should fear to have blazoned to the whole realm of France. Come hither, young gentleman. Are you willing to serve me ?"

"If not willing before, sir," answered Jean Charost, "what I have heard to-night would make me willing to shed the last drop of my blood for your Highness."

The Duke smiled upon him kindly.

"Good," he said. "Good. You are of noble race, my friend tells me."

"On all sides," answered Jean Charost, "of the nobility of the sword."

"Well, then," said the Duke, "we will soon find an office for you. Let me think for a moment."

But ere the words had left his lips, there was a sharp rap at the door, and without waiting for permission, a man, dressed as a superior servant, hurried in, followed by an elderly woman, in an extravagantly high *hennin*—a head dress of the times—both bearing eagerness and alarm on their countenance.

"I am sorry to tell your Highness," cried the man—

But the Duke stopped him, exclaiming—"Hush!" with a look of anxiety and alarm, and then advanced a step or two towards the new comers, with whom he spoke for a few moments in an eager whisper. He then took several rapid strides towards the

door; but paused before he reached it, and, looking back, almost without stopping, exclaimed—

"To-morrow, my young friend. Be with me to-morrow by nine—I will send for you in the evening, Maitre Jacques—I trust then to have news for you—excuse me now—something has happened."

CHAPTER III.

For a moment after the Duke of Orleans had quitted the hall, Jacques Cœur and his young companion stood looking at each other in silence; for the agitation which the Prince had displayed was far greater than persons in his rank usually suffered to appear. Those were the days when strong passions lay concealed under calm exteriors, and terrible deeds were often meditated, and even executed, under cover of the most tranquil aspect.

"Come, Jean, my friend," said the mer

chant, at length. "Let us go. We must not pause here with these papers on the table."

As he spoke, he walked towards the door; but before he quitted the house, he sought diligently in the outer vestibule, and the neighbouring rooms, for some of the domestics. All seemed to be in confusion, however; and, though steps were heard moving about in various directions, as if some general search were being made, several minutes elapsed before even a page or a porter could be found.

At length, a boy of about twelve years of age presented himself; and Jacques Cœur directed him, in a tone of authority, to place himself at the door of the little hall, and neither to go in himself, nor let any one enter, till he had an opportunity of letting the Duke know that he had left the papers he was writing, on the table.

"Something has moved his Highness very greatly," said Jacques Cœur, as he walked through the streets with his young companion.

"He is not usually so careless of what he writes."

"I have always heard him called the gay Duke of Orleans," said Jean Charost, "and I certainly was surprised to find him so grave and thoughtful."

"There are many ways of being thoughtful, my young friend," replied the merchant; "and a light and smiling air, a playful fancy, and a happy choice of words, with many persons —as has been the case of the Duke—may conceal deep meaning and great strength of mind. He is, indeed, one of the most thoughtful men in France; but his imagination is somewhat too strong, and his passions, alas! stronger still. He is frank, and noble, and generous, however—kind and forgiving; and I do sincerely believe that he bitterly regrets his faults, and condemns them as much as any man in France. Many are the resolutions of reformation that he makes; but still an ardent temperament, a light humour, and a joyous spirit, carry him

away impulsively, and deeds are done, before he well knows they are undertaken, which are bitterly repented afterwards."

Jacques Cœur paused, and seemed to hesitate, as if he thought he had almost gone too far with his young companion; but more serious considerations were pressing upon his mind at that moment than Jean Charost, or even the Duke of Orleans, at all comprehended, though both were affected by them. Jacques was one of the most remarkable men of his age; and, although he had not at that time risen to the high point of either honour or wealth which he afterwards attained, he was in the high road to distinction and to fortune—a road open to him by no common means. His vast, and comprehensive mind perceived opportunities which escaped the eyes of men more limited in intellect; his energetic and persevering character enabled him to grasp and hold them; and, together with these powers, so serviceable to any man in commercial or political life, he

possessed a still higher characteristic; a kindly and a generous spirit, prompting to good deeds as well as to great ones, and always under the guidance of prudence and wisdom. He had, moreover, that which I know not whether to call an art or a quality—the capability of impressing almost all men with the truths of his character. Few, with whom he was brought in any close connection, doubted his judgment or his sincerity; and his true beneficence of heart had the power of attaching others to him so strongly, that even persecution, sorrow, and misfortune, could not break the bond.

In the present instance, he had two objects in view in placing Jean Charost in the service of the Duke of Orleans—or rather, he saw at once, that two objects might possibly be attained by that kind act. He had provided, apparently, well and happily for a youth to whom he was sincerely attached, and whom he could entirely trust; and he placed near a prince for whom he had a great regard, and some ad-

miration, notwithstanding all his faults, one whose character was likely to be not without its influence, even upon a person far higher in station, and more brilliant, as well as more experienced ,than himself.

Although he had full confidence in Jean Charost—although he knew that there was an integrity of purpose and a vigour of determination in the youth, well fitted to stand all trials, he, nevertheless, thought that some warning—some knowledge, at least, of the circumstances in which he was about to be placed—might be serviceable to him, and give a beneficial direction to any influence he might obtain with the Duke. To impart this, was his object in turning the conversation at once to the character of Louis of Orleans; yet, the natural delicacy of his mind led him to hesitate when touching upon the failings of his princely friend. The higher purpose, however, predominated at length, and he went boldly forward.

"It is necessary, Jean," he said, "to

prepare you, in some degree, for the scenes in which you will have to mingle, and especially to afford you some information of the character of the Prince you are about to serve. I will mention no names, as people are passing in the street; but you will understand of whom I speak. He is habitually licentious. The Courts of Kings are very generally depraved; and impressions received in early life, however reason and religion may fight against them at after periods, still leave a weak and assailable point in the character, not easily strengthened for resistance. Man's heart is as a fortress, my young friend, a breach effected in the walls of which, is rarely if ever repaired with as much firmness as at first. I do not wish to palliate his errors, for they are very great; but merely to explain my anxiety to have good counsels near him."

"It is very necessary, indeed, sir," replied Jean Charost, simply, never dreaming that *his* counsels could be those to which Jacques Cœur

alluded. "I have heard a good deal of the Duke since we have been here in Paris; and although all must love and admire his great and noble qualities, yet it is sad to hear the tales men tell of him."

"Age and experience," replied Jacques Cœur, "may have some effect—nay, are already having an effect in rendering good resolutions firmer, and the yielding to temptation less frequent. It is only required now that some person, having influence over him, and constantly near him, should throw that influence into the scale of right. I know not, my dear lad, whether you may or may not obtain influence with him. He has promised me to treat you with all favor, and to keep you as near his person as possible; and I feel quite sure that if any opportunities occur, of throwing in a word in favor of virtue and good conduct, or of opposing vice and licentiousness, you will not fail to seize it. I do not mean to instigate you to meddle in the affairs of this Prince, or to in-

trude counsels upon him. To do so would be impertinent and wrong in one of your position; but he himself may furnish opportunity. Consult you, he will not; but converse with you often, he probably will; and it is quite possible, in a calm, quiet, unobtrusive course, to set good counsel before him, without appearing to advise, or pretending to meddle."

"I should fear," replied Jean Charost, "that he would converse very little with a boy like me, and certainly not attend much to my opinions."

"That will greatly depend upon the station you obtain in his household," replied Jacques Cœur. "If you are very much near his person, I doubt not that he will. Those who give way to their passions, Jean, and plunge into a sea of intrigue, are often in situations of difficulty and anxiety, where they can find no counsel in their own breasts, no comfort in their own hearts. It is then that they will fly to any one who may happen to be near, for

help and for resource. I only say such things *may* happen, not that they *will*; but if they do, I trust to you, Jean Charost, to use them to good purpose."

The conversation proceeded much in the same tone, till they reached the lodging of the merchant, and ascended once more to the small chamber in which Jean Charost had been writing. By this time, according to the notions of Jacques Cœur, it was too late for any one to be out of bed; and he and his young companion separated for the night.

On the following morning, however, when Jean descended to the counting-room, or office, at an early hour, he found Jacques Cœur already there, and one or two of his servants with him. He heard orders given about horses, and equipments of various kinds, before the great merchant seemed aware of his presence. But when the servants were all despatched upon their various errands, Jacques turned and greeted him kindly.

"Let us talk of a little business, my son," he said; "for in an hour's time we shall have to part on our several ways: you to the Hotel D'Orleans; I, back again to Bourges; for I am weary of this great city, Jean; and besides, business calls me hence. Now, let us, like good merchants, reckon what it is I am in your debt."

"Nay, sir," answered Jean Charost. "It is I that am altogether in yours—I do not mean alone for kindness; but even in mere money. I have received more from you, I believe, than you promised to give me."

"More than the mere stipend, Jean," replied Jacques Cœur; "but not more than what was implied. I promised your mother, excellent lady, God bless her, that I would give you a hundred crowns of the sun by the year; and, moreover, whatever I found your assistance was worth to me besides. I deal with it merely as a matter of account, Jean; and I find that, by the transactions with Genoa, partly carried

on by yourself in the last year, I have made a profit of sixteen per cent on invested money: on the Amalfi business, transacted altogether by yourself, nineteen per cent: on other business of a similar kind, which I and my ordinary clerks have had to do alone, an average of fifteen per cent. Thus, in all affairs that you have dealt with, there has been a gain, over ordinary gains, of somewhere between three and four per cent. Now, this surplus is to be divided between you and me, according to my view of the case. I have looked into it closely, to do justice to both; and I find that, as the transactions of this year have been somewhat large, I am a debtor to you in a sum of two thousand seven hundred and forty-three crowns, two *livres* Parisis, and one *denier*. There is a note of the account: I think you will find it correct."

Poor Jean Charost was astonished and overcome. The small patrimony of his father, was just sufficient to maintain a man of gentle blood

within that narrow limit, thronged with petty cares, usually called moderate competence—a sort of myth, embellished by the poets—a kind of economical Arcadia, in which that perfect happiness represented, is as often found, as the Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses, in plum-colored velvet coats and pink ribbons, are found in the real pastoral. This small estate, had been hypothecated to the amount of three thousand crowns, to enable his father to serve and die for his sovereign on the battle-field; and the great first object of Jean Charost's ambition had been to enable his poor mother to pay off a debt, which, with its interest, was eating into the core of the estate. Hitherto, the prospect of success had seemed far, far away: he had thought he could see it in the distance; but he had doubted and feared, and the long journey to travel had seemed to dim even the sunshine of hope. But now the case was reversed: the prospect seemed near: the object was well nigh attained; and, for an in-

stant or two, he could hardly believe his ears.

"Oh, sir!" he exclaimed, after some murmured thanks, "take it to my mother—take it all to my mother. It will make her heart leap for joy. I shall want no money where I am going."

Jacques Cœur gazed at him, with the faint, rueful smile of age listening to inexperience.

"You will need more than you know, my good youth," he answered. "Courts are very different places from merchants' houses; and if great openings are there found, there are openings of the purse likewise. But I know your object, my dear boy. It is a worthy one, and you can gratify it, to a certain extent, while you yet retain the means of appearing as you should in the household of the Duke of Orleans. I will take two thousand crowns to your mother. Then only a thousand more will remain to be paid upon the mortgage, which I

will discharge; and you shall repay me when your economy and your success, in both of which I have great confidence, shall make it light for you to do so."

Such was the kindly plan proposed by the merchant, and Jean Charost acceded joyfully. It must not be denied, that to be in possession of seven hundred crowns, seemed, in his young and untaught eyes, to put him amongst the wealthy of the land. It must not be denied, either, that the thought rose up of many things he wanted, which he had never much felt the want of before. Amongst the rest, a horse seemed perfectly indispensable; but the kindness of Jacques Cœur had, before hand, deprived him of all excuse for this not unreasonable expense. He found that a fine horse, taken in payment of a debt, from Spain, with bridle and housings, all complete, had been destined for his use by the great merchant.

Well mounted, therefore, and, as he thought, well equipped with all things, Jean Charost

set out for the Hotel D'Orleans at about half-past eight o'clock, carrying a message from Jacques Cœur to the Duke, to account for, and excuse, the sudden departure of the merchant.

CHAPTER IV.

To retrace one's steps is always difficult, and it may be as well, whenever the urgency of action will permit it, in life, as in a tale that is told, to pause a little upon the present, and not to hurry on too rapidly to the future, lest the stern irrevocable follow us too closely. I know nothing more difficult, or more necessary, to impress upon the mind of youth, than the great and important fact, that every thing, once done, is irrevocable—that Fate sets its seal upon the deed, and upon the word—that it

is a bond to good or evil—that, though sometimes we may alter the conditions in a degree, the weightier obligations of that bond can never be changed—that there is something recorded in the great book against us, a balance for or adverse to us, which speeds us lightly onwards, or hampers all our after efforts.

No, no. There is no going back. As in the fairy tale, the forest closes up behind us as we pass through; and, in the great adventure of life, our only way is forward.

Life, in some of its phases, should always be the model of a book; and, to avoid the necessity of even trying to go back, it may be as well to pause here, and tell some events which had occurred within the space of time which our tale has already occupied.

In a chamber, furnished with fantastic splendour, and in a house not far from the palace of the Duke of Orleans, stood a richly decorated bed. It was none of those scanty, parsimonious, modern contrivances, in which space to turn

seems grudged to the unhappy inmate; but a large, stately, elaborate structure, almost a room in itself. The four posts at the four corners were carved and gilt, and ornamented with ivory and gold. Groups of cupids or cherubim, I know not well which, supported the pillars, treading gaily upon flowers; and as people were not very considerate of harmony in those days, the sculptor of this bed, for so, I suppose, we must call him, had added Corinthian capitals to the posts, and crowned the acanthus of dark wood with large plumes of real Ostrich feathers. Round the vallance, and in many parts of the draperies, which were of a light crimson velvet, appeared numerous inscriptions embroidered in gold. Some were lines from poets of the day, or old romances of the *L'angue d' oc*, or *L'angue d' oi;* while, strange to say, others were verses from the Psalms of David.

On this bed, lay a lady, sweetly asleep, beautiful but pale, and bearing traces of recent

illness on her face; and beside her lay a babe, which seemed ten days or a fortnight old, swathed up, according to the abominable custom of the day, in what was then called *en mailotin*. A lamp was on a table near, a vacant chair by the bed-side, from which a heedless nurse had just escaped to take a little relaxation during her lady's slumbers.

All was still and silent in the room and throughout the house. The long and narrow corridors were vacant, the lower hall was far off. The silver bell, which was placed nigh at hand, might have rang long and loud without calling any one to that bed side; but the nurse trusted to the first calm slumber of the night, and doubtless promised herself that her absence would not be long. It proved long enough—somewhat too long, however.

The door opened with hardly a sound, and a tall, gray figure entered, which could scarcely have been seen from the bed, in the twilight obscurity of that side of the room, even had

any eyes been open there. It advanced stealthily to the side of the bed, with the right hand hidden in the breast; but there for a moment, whatever was the intent, the figure paused, and its eyes gazed down upon the sleeping woman, and the babe by her side. Oh, what changes of expression came driven, like storm-clouds, over that countenance by some tempest of passions within; and what a contrast did the man's face present to that of the sleeping girl! It might be that the wronger and the wronged were there in presence, and that calm, peaceful sleep reigned quietly, where remorse, and anguish, and repentance should have held their sway, while anguish, and rage, and revenge were busy in the heart which had done no evil.

Whether it was doubt, or hesitation, or a feeling of pity, which produced the pause, I cannot tell; but, whatever was the man's purpose—and it could hardly be good—he stopped and gazed, for more than one minute, ere

he made the attempt, a deed. At length, however, he withdrew the right hand from his bosom, and something gleamed in the lamplight.

It is strange, the lady moved a little in her sleep, as if the gleam of the iron had made itself felt; and she murmured a name. Her hand and arm were cast carelessly over the bedclothes; her left side and breast were exposed. The name she murmured seemed to act like a command; for instantly one hand was pressed upon her lips, and the other violently struck her side. The cry was smothered; the hands clutched the air in vain; a slight convulsive effort to rise, an agueish shudder, and all was still.

The assassin withdrew his hand; but left the dagger in the wound. Oh, with what bitter skill had he done the deed! The steel had pierced through and through her heart!

There he stood for a moment, and contemplated his handiwork. What was in his breast,

who can tell? But suddenly he seemed to start from his dark revenge, took the hand he had made lifeless in his own, and withdrew a wedding-ring from the unresisting finger.

Though passion is fond of soliloquy, he uttered but few words.

"Now let him come and look!" he murmured; and then, going rapidly round to the other side of the bed, he snatched up the infant, cast part of his robe around it, and departed.

Oh, what an awful, terrible thing was the stillness which reigned in that terrible chamber after the murderer was gone. It seemed as if there were something more than silence there —a thick, dull, motionless air of death and guilt. It lasted a long while; more than half an hour; and then, walking on tip-toe, came back the nurse. For a moment or two she did not perceive that anything had happened. All was so quiet, so much as she had left it, that she fancied no change had taken place. She

moved about stealthily, arranged some silver cups and tankards upon a *dressoir*, and smoothed out the damask covering with its fringe of lace.

Presently there was a light tap at the door; and, going thither on tip-toe, she found one of the Duke of Orleans' chief servants come to enquire after the lady's health.

"Hush!" said the nurse, lifting up her finger; "she is sleeping like an angel."

"And the baby?" asked the man.

"She is asleep too," replied the nurse; "she has not given a cry for an hour."

"That's strange," said the man. "I thought babies cried every five minutes."

Upon second thoughts, the nurse judged it strange too, and a certain sort of cold dread came upon her, as she remembered her long absence, and combined it with the perfect stillness.

"Stay a moment; I'll just take a peep, and tell you more." And she advanced noiselessly

to the side of the bed. The moment she gazed in, she uttered a fearful shriek. Nature was too strong for art or policy. There lay the mother, dead; the infant was gone; and the woman screamed aloud, though she knew that the whole must be told, and her own negligence exposed.

The man darted in from the door, and rushed to the side of the bed. The bloody evidences of the deed which had been done were plain before him; and, catching the nurse by the arm, he questioned her vehemently.

She was a friend of his, however—indeed I believe a relation. First came a confession, and then a consultation. She declared she had not been absent five minutes, and that the deed must have been done within that short time—that somebody must have been concealed in the room at the time she left; for she had been so close at hand that she must have seen any one pass. She went on to declare that she believed it must have been done by sorcery; and, as sorcery

was in great repute at that time, the man might have been of her opinion, if the gore and the wound had not plainly shown a mortal agency.

Then came the question of what was to be done. The Duke must be told; that was clear; and it was agreed by both the man and the woman that it would be better for them to bear their own tale.

"Do not let us tell him all at once," said the nurse; for horror and grief had by this time been swallowed up in more personal considerations. "He would kill us both on the spot, I do believe. Tell him at first that she is very ill: then, when he is going to see her, that she is dying: then that she is dead: and then—and then,—let him find out that she has been murdered, himself.—Good gracious! I should not wonder if the murderer was still in the room.—Did you not think you saw the curtain move?" And she gave a fearful glance towards the bed.

The man unsheathed his sword, and, for the first time, they searched the room, which they had never thought of before.

Nothing, however, could be found—not a vestige of the murderer—the very dagger that had done the deed was gone; and, after some further consultation, and some expressions of horror and regret, they set out to bear the intelligence to the Duke of Orleans, neglecting, in the fear of any one forestalling them, to give any directions for pursuit of the murderer. The house lay close to the Orleans palace, with an entrance from it into the gardens of the latter. Through that door they passed, walked down a short avenue of trees and vases, crossed a walk, and entered the palace by a side door.

The man made his way straight towards the little hall, closely followed by the woman, and found the Duke, as I have shown, in conversation with Jacques Cœur, and Jean Charost. As had been agreed, the Prince was at first in-

formed that the lady was very ill, and even that intelligence caused the agitation which I have depicted; but how can I describe his state of mind, when the whole truth was known, the fire of his rage, the abyss of his sorrow; and more, far more than all, the depth, the poignancy, of his remorse? When he looked upon that beautiful and placid face, lying there in the cold, dull sleep of death—when he saw the fair bosom deluged in purple gore—when he remembered that, for the gratification of his light love, he had torn her from the arms of a husband who doted on her, from peaceful happiness, and tranquil innocence, if not from joy and splendor—when he thought he had made her an adultress, had brought disgrace upon her name, had been even, as he felt at that moment, accessory to her death—the worm that never dies seemed to fix itself upon his heart; and, casting himself down beside the bed, he cursed the day that he was born, and invoked bitterer curses on his own head, than his

worst enemy would have dared to pile upon him.

True, in his anguish he did not altogether forget his energy. Instant orders were given to search for, and pursue, the murderer, and especial directions to beset all the doors of a small hotel in the neighbourhood of the Temple, and to mark well who went out or came in. But this being done, he fell again into the dark apathy of despair, and, seated in the chamber of death, slept not, nor took any refreshment, throughout the live-long night. Priests came in, tall tapers were set in order, with vases of holy water, and silver censers. Then solemn voices were raised in sacred song.

But the Duke sat there unmoved: his arms were crossed upon his chest—his eyes fixed with a stony glare upon the floor. No one dared to speak to or disturb him; and the dark, long night of winter waned away, and the gray morning sunlight entered the chamber, ere he quitted the side of her he had loved and ruined.

CHAPTER V.

Hope is nothing better than a bit of cork floating on the sea of life, now tossed up into the sky, now sunk down into the abyss; but rising, rising again over the crest of the foamy wave, and topping all things even unto the end.

Joyous and hopeful, Jean Charost presented himself at the gates of the Duke of Orleans' palace; but the heavy door under the archway was closed, and some minutes elapsed ere he obtained admission. The tall man, who at length opened the door, seemed very doubtful

whether he would let him in; and it was not till Jean had explained that the Duke had appointed him, and that he was the person who had accompanied Jacques Cœur on the preceding night, that the man would suffer him to pass the wicket. He then told him, however, to go on to the house, and enquire for the master of the pages.

Jean Charost was not very well satisfied with this reply; for to his mind it seemed to indicate that the Duke had made up his mind to place him among his pages, and had given orders accordingly. Now the position of a page in a great household was not very desirable in the eyes of Jean Charost. Besides, he had passed the age, he thought, when such a post was appropriate. He had completed his seventeenth year, and looked older than he really was.

He walked on, however; but, hearing a step behind him, looked round, and saw a man following him. There was nothing very marvellous in this; and he proceeded on his way

till he found himself in the vestibule before described, and asked, as he had been directed, for the master of the pages. The man to whom he addressed himself, said:

"I'll send you to him. You were here last night, were you not, young gentleman?"

Jean Charost answered in the affirmative; and the man made a sign to the person who had followed the youth across the garden, and had entered the vestibule with him. Immediately, Jean felt his arm taken hold of somewhat roughly by the personage behind him; and before he well knew what was taking place, he was pulled into a small room on one side of the vestibule, and the door closed upon him. The room was already tenanted by three or four persons of different conditions. One seemed an old soldier, with a very white beard, and a scar across his brow. One was dressed as a mendicant friar; and one, by his round jacket, knee-breeches, and blue stockings, with broad-toed shoes, and a little square cap, was evidently a mechanic.

The old soldier was walking up and down the room with a very irritable air. The mendicant friar was telling his beads with great rapidity: the mechanic sat in a corner, twirling his thumbs round and round each other, and looking half stupified. The scene did not explain itself in the least; and Jean stood for a minute or two, not at all comprehending why he was brought there, or what was to happen next.

"By Saint Hubert, this is too bad!" exclaimed the old soldier, at length; and, approaching the door, he tried to open it, but it was locked.

"Pray, what is the matter?" asked Jean Charost, simply.

"Why, don't you know?" exclaimed the old man. "On my life, I believe the Duke is as mad as his brother."

"The fact is, my son," said the friar, "some offence was committed here last night, a robbery, or a murder; and the Duke has given orders that everybody who was at the house

after the hour of seven, should be detained till the matter is investigated."

"He does not suppose *I* committed a murder!" exclaimed the old soldier, in a tone of great indignation.

"I can't tell that," replied the friar, with a quiet smile. "Gentlemen of your profession sometimes do."

"I never murdered anybody in my life," whined the mechanic.

"Happy for you," said the friar, "and happier still if you get people to believe you."

He then addressed himself to his beads again; and for nearly an hour all was silence in the room, except the low muttering of the friar's paters and aves. But the gay hopes of Jean Charost sank a good deal under the influence of delay and uncertainty, although, of course, he felt nothing like alarm at the situation in which he was placed.

At length, a man in a black gown and a square black cap was introduced, struggling, it

is true, and saying, to those who pushed him in:

"Mark, I resist! It is not with my own consent. This incarceration is illegal. The Duke is not a Lord High Justiciary on this ground; and for every minute I will have my damages, if there be honesty in the Sovereign Courts, or justice in France."

The door was closed upon him, however, unceremoniously; for the servants of great men in those days were not very much accustomed to attend to punctilios of law; and the advocate, for so he seemed, turned to his fellow prisoners, and told them in indignant terms how he had been engaged to defend the steward of the prince in a little case of scandal that had arisen in the Marais, how he had visited him to consult, the night before, and had been seized on his return that day, and thrust in there upon a pretence that would not bear an argument.

"I thought," said the old soldier, bitterly, "that you men of the robe would make any-

thing bear an argument. I know you argued me out of all my fortune amongst you."

The little petulant man of law had not time to reply, when the door was opened, and the whole party marched into the presence of the Duke of Orleans, under the escort of half-a-dozen men-at-arms.

The Duke was seated in the little hall, where Jean Charost had seen him on the preceding night. His hair was rough and dishevelled, and his apparel neglected. His eyes were fixed upon the table before him, and he only raised them once or twice during the little scene that followed; but a venerable-looking man, who sat beside him, and who was, in fact, one of the judges of the Chatelet, kept his eyes upon the little party who entered with Jean Charost, with one of those cold, fixed, but piercing looks, which seem to search the heart by less guarded avenues than the lips.

"Ah, Maitre Pierrot Le Brun!" he said, looking at the advocate. "I will deal with

you, brother, first. Pray what was it brought you hither last night, and again this morning?"

The advocate replied, but in a tone greatly subdued, as compared with that which he had used in the company of his fellow prisoners. His case was soon proved, and he was suffered to depart, offering somewhat humiliating thanks for his speedy dismissal.

The old soldier, however, maintained his surly tone; and, when questioned what brought him thither the night before, and that day, replied boldly,

"I came to see if the Duke of Orleans would do something for a man-at-arms of Charles the Fifth. I fought for his father, and was one half ruined by my services to my king, the other half by such men as the one who has just gone out. I can couch a lance, or wield a sword, as well as ever; and I don't see why, being a gentleman of name and

arms, I should be thrown on one side like a rusty plastron."

The Duke of Orleans suddenly raised his head, asked the old man's name, wrote something on a bit of paper, and gave it to him, seeming to raise no small emotions of joy and satisfaction; for the soldier caught his hand, and kissed it warmly, as if his utmost wishes were gratified.

The judge was asking some more questions; but the Duke interfered, saying,

"I know him—let him pass. He had no share in this."

The mendicant friar was next examined; and, to say the truth, his account of himself did not seem, to the ears of Jean Charost at least, to be quite as satisfactory as could be desired. His only excuse for being twice in the palace of the Duke within four-and-twenty hours was, that he came to beg an alms for his convent; and there was a look of shrewd mean-

ing in his countenance while he replied, which, to one who did not know all the various trades exercised by gentry of his cloth, seemed exceedingly suspicious. The Duke and the magistrate, however, appeared to be satisfied; and the former then turned his eyes upon Jean Charost, while the judge called up the mechanic, and put some questions to him.

"Who are you, young gentleman?" said the Duke of Orleans, motioning Jean to approach him. "I have seen your face somewhere—who are you?"

"I waited upon your Highness last night," replied Jean Charost, with the rear-guard of all his hopes and expectations routed by the discovery that the Duke did not even recollect him. "I was brought hither by Monsieur Jacques Cœur; and, by your own commands, I returned this morning at nine o'clock."

"I remember," said the Duke, "I remember." And, casting down his eyes again, he fell into a fit of thought, which had not come

to an end when the judge concluded his examination of the poor mechanic. That examination had lasted longer than any of the others; for it seemed that the man had been working, till a late hour on the preceding evening, on the bolts of some windows which looked from a neighbouring house into the gardens of the Orleans' palace, and that, shortly before the hour at which the murder was committed, he had seen a tall man pass swiftly along the corridor near which he was employed. He could not describe his apparel, the obscurity having prevented his remarking the colour; but he declared that it looked like the costume of a priest or a monk, and was certainly furnished with a hood, much in the shape of a cowl. This was all that could be extracted from him, and, indeed, it was evident that he knew no more; so, in the end, he was suffered to depart.

The judge then turned to Jean Charost, who remained standing before the Duke of Orleans,

in anxious expectation of what was to come next. The Duke remained still buried in thought; for the young man's reply to his question had probably revived, in his mind, all the painful feelings which had had been occasioned by the intelligence which had interrupted his conversation with Jacques Cœur.

"What is your name, your profession, and what brought you to the Orleans' palace last night, young man?" asked the judge, in a grave, but not a stern, tone.

"My name is Jean Charost de Brecy," replied the young man, "a gentleman by name and arms; and I came hither last night—"

But the Duke of Orleans roused himself from his reverie, and waved his hand, saying,

"Enough—enough, my good friend. I know all about this young man. He could have no share in the dark deed; for he was with me when it was done. I forgot his face

for a moment; but I remember him well now, and what I promised him."

"Suffer me, your highness," said the judge. "We know not what he may have seen in coming or going. Things which seem trifles often have bearings of great weight upon important facts. At what time came you hither, young gentleman? Were you alone? and if not, who was with you?"

Jean Charost answered briefly and distinctly; and the judge then enquired,

"Did you meet any one as you entered this house, who seemed to be quitting it?"

"No," replied Jean Charost. "Several persons were lingering about the gate, and in front, between the walls and the chain; but nobody seemed quitting the spot.

"No one in a long flowing robe and cowl, the habit of a priest or a friar?" asked the judge.

"No," replied Jean Charost; "but we saw, a few moments before, a man such as you

describe, seeking admission at the gates of a large house, like a monastery. He seemed in haste, too, from the way he rang the bell."

The judge questioned him closely as to the position of the house he described; and, when he had given his answer, turned to the Duke, saying—

"The Celestins."

"*They* have had nought to do with it," replied the Duke, at once. "The good brethren loved me too well to inflict such grief upon me."

"They have cause, my Lord," replied the judge; "but we do not always find that gratitude follows good offices. By your permission, I will make some enquiry as to who was the person who entered their gates last night, at the hour named."

"As you will," replied the Duke, shaking his head; "but I repeat, there is something within me which tells me, better than the clearest evidence, who was the man that did this

horrid act; and he is not at the Celestins. Inquire, if you please; but it is in vain, I know. He and I shall meet, however, ere our lives end. My conscience was loaded on his account. He has well balanced the debt; and when we meet—"

He added no more; but clasped his hands tight together, and set his teeth bitterly.

"Nevertheless, I will enquire," said the judge, who seemed somewhat pertinacious in his own opinions. "It is needful that this should be sifted to the bottom. Such acts are becoming too common."

As he spoke, he rose and took his leave, bidding the artizan follow him; and Jean Charost remained alone in the presence of the Duke of Orleans, though two or three servants and armed men passed and repassed, from time to time, across the farther end of the hall.

For a few minutes the Duke remained in thought; but, at length, he lifted his eyes to Jean Charost's face, and gazed at

him, for a short time, with an absent air. Then rising, he beckoned him to follow, saying—

"Come with me. There is a weight in this air. It is heavy with sorrow."

As he uttered these words, he led the way through a small door at the end of the hall, opposite to that by which the young gentleman had entered, into a large, square, inner court of the palace, round three sides of which, ran an arcade or cloister.

"Give me your arm," said the Duke, as they issued forth; and, leaning somewhat heavily on his young companion, he continued to pace up and down the arcade for more than an hour, sometimes in silence, sometimes speaking a few words—asking a question—making an observation on the reply—or giving voice to the feelings of his own heart in expressions which Jean Charost did not half understand.

More than once, a page, a servant, or an armed officer would come and ask a question,

receive the Duke's answer, and retire. But in all instances, the Prince's reply was short, and made without pausing in his walk. It was evidently one of those moments of struggle when the mind seeks to cast off the oppression of some great and heavy grief, rousing itself again to resist, after one of all the many stunning blows which every individual must encounter in this mortal career. And it is wonderful how various is the degree of elasticity—the power of re-action—shown by the spirits of different men in the same circumstances. The weak and puny, the tender and the gentle, fall, crushed, as it were, probably never to recover, or crawl away from a battle field, for which they are not fitted, to seek in solitude an escape from the combat of life. The stern and hardy warrior, accustomed to endure and to resist, may be cast down for a moment by the shock, but starts on his feet again, ready to do battle the next instant: and the light and elastic one leaps up with the very recoil of the

fall, and mingles in the *mêlée* again, as if sporting with the ills of the world. In the character of the Duke of Orleans, there was something of both the latter classes of mind. From his very infancy he had been called upon to deal with the hard things of life. Strife, evil, sorrow, care, danger, had been round his cradle and his youth; and his manhood had been passed in contests often provoked by himself, often forced upon him by others.

It was evident that, in the present case, the Prince had suffered deeply; and we have seen that he yielded, more than perhaps he had ever done before, to the weight of his sorrow; but he was now making a great effort to cast off the impression, and to turn his mind to new themes, as a relief from the bitterness of memory.

He was, in some degree, successful; although his thoughts would wander back from time to time to the painful topic from which he sought to withdraw them; but every moment he re-

covered himself more and more. At first, his conversation with Jean Charost consisted principally of questions, the replies to which were hardly heard, or noticed; but gradually he began to show a greater interest in the subjects spoken of, questioned the young man much, both in regard to Jacques Cœur, and to his own fate and history; and, though he mused occasionally over the replies, yet he soon returned to the main subject, and seemed pleased and well satisfied with the answers he received.

Indeed, the circumstances attending the first introduction and second interview of Jean Charost by the Duke, were of themselves fortunate. He became associated, as it were, in the Prince's mind, with moments sanctified by sorrow, and filled with deep emotion. A link of sympathy seemed to be established between them, which nothing else could have produced; and the calm, graceful, thoughtful tone of the young man's mind, harmonized so

well with the temporary feelings of the Prince, that in the hour which followed he had made more progress in his regard, than a gayer, a lighter, a more brilliant spirit could have done in double the time.

Still, nothing had been said of the position which Jean Charost was to occupy in the Prince's household, when a man, bearing a long white wand, entered, and informed the Duke, that the Duke de Berri was coming that way to visit him. Orleans turned, and advanced a few steps towards a door leading from the Court into the interior of the building, as if to meet his noble relation. But before he was half down the arcade, the Duke de Berri was marshalled in with some state by the Prince's officers.

"Leave us," said the Duke of Orleans, speaking to the attendants, as soon as he had embraced his relation; and Jean Charost, receiving the command as general, was about to follow. But the Prince stopped him, beckoning

him up, and presented him to the Duke de Berri, saying—"This is my young secretary, noble uncle; given to me by my good friend Jacques Cœur. I have much to say to you, some part of which it may be necessary to reduce to writing. We had better, therefore, keep him near us."

The Duke de Berri merely bowed his head, gazing at Jean Charost, thoughtfully; and the Prince added—

"But the air is shrewd and keen even here, notwithstanding the sunshine. Let us go into the octagon chamber. No, not there. It overlooks that dreadful room. This way, my uncle."

CHAPTER VI.

"THAT is beautiful writing," said the Duke of Orleans, laying one hand upon Jean Charost's shoulder, and leaning over him, as he added the few last words to the proposal of accommodation between the Prince and the Duke of Burgundy. "Can the hand that guides a pen so well, wield a sword, and couch a lance?"

"It may be somewhat out of practice, sir," replied Jean Charost, "for months have passed since it tried either; but while my father lived

it was my pastime, and he said, I should make a soldier."

"He was a good one himself, and a good judge," replied the Duke. "But we will try you, Jean—we will try you. Now give me the pen. I can write my name, at least, which is more than some great men can do."

Jean Charost rose, and the Duke, seating himself, signed his name in a good, bold hand, and folded up the paper.

"There, my uncle," he continued; "be you the messenger of peace to the Hotel d'Artois. I must go to St. Pol to see my poor brother. He was in sad case yesterday; but I have ever remarked that his fury is greatest on the eve of amendment. Would to God that we could but have an interval of reason, sufficiently long for him to settle all these distracting affairs himself, and place the government of the kingdom on a basis more secure! Gladly would I retire from all these cares and toils, and pass the rest of my days—"

"In pleasure?" asked the Duke de Berri, with a faint smile.

A cloud came instantly over the face of the Duke of Orleans.

"Nay, not so," he replied, in a tone of deep melancholy. "Pleasure is past, good uncle. I would have said—and pass the rest of my days in thought, in sorrow, and, perhaps, in penitence."

"Would that it might be so!" rejoined the old man; and he shook his head. with a sigh, and a doubtful look.

"You know not what has happened here," said the Duke of Orleans, laying his hand gloomily upon his uncle's arm—"an event, fearful enough to awaken any spirit not plunged in utter apathy. I cannot tell you—I dare not remember it. But you will soon hear. Let us go forth."

And, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, he walked slowly out of the room, accompanied by the Duke de Berri without taking any farther

notice of Jean Charost, who followed a step or two behind, to the outer court, where the horses and attendants of both the Princes were waiting for them.

Some word, some indication, of what he was to do, of what was expected from him, or how he was to proceed, Jean Charost certainly did look for. But none was given. Wrapt in dark and sorrowful meditations, the Duke mounted, and rode slowly away, without seeming to perceive even the groom who held his stirrup; and the young man remained in the Court, a complete stranger amongst a crowd of youths and men, each of whom knew his place, and had his occupation. His heart had not been lightened, his mind had not been cheered, by all the events of the morning; and the gloomy, mysterious hints, which he had heard, of a dark and terrible crime having been committed within those walls, brooded with a shadowy horror over the scene.

But those who surrounded Jean seemed

not in the least to share such sensations. Death tenanted a chamber hard by: the darkened windows of the house that flanked the garden, could be seen from the spot where they stood; and yet there seemed not a heavy heart amongst them. No one mourned: no one looked sad. One elderly man turned away, whistling, and re-entered the palace. Two squires, in the prime of life, began to spar and wrestle, with rude jocularity, the moment their lord's back was turned; and many a monkey-trick was played by the young pages, while three or four lads, some older, some younger, than Jean Charost himself, stood laughing and talking at one side of the court, with their eyes fixed upon him.

He felt his situation growing exceedingly unpleasant; and, after some consideration, he made up his mind to turn back again into the house, and ask to see the master of the pages, to whom he had been first directed; but just as he was about to put this purpose in execu-

tion, a tall, gaily dressed young man, with budding moustache, and sword and dagger by his side, came from the little group I have mentioned, and bowed low to the young stranger, with a gay but supercilious air.

"May I inquire," he said, using somewhat antiquated phrases, and all the grimace of courtesy, "may I inquire, *Beau Sire*, who the *Beau Sire* may be, and what may be his business here?"

Jean Charost was not very apt to take offence; and, though the tone and manner was insolent, and his feelings were but little in harmony with a joke, he replied, quietly enough—

"My name is Jean Charost de Brecy, and my business, sir, is certainly not with you."

"How can the *Beau Sire* tell that?" demanded the other; while two or three more from the same youthful group gathered round, "seeing that he knows not my name. But on that score I will enlighten him. My name is Juvenel de Royans."

"Then, Monsieur Juvenel de Royans," replied the young man, growing a little angry, "I will, in turn, inform you how I know that my business is not with you. It is simply because it lies with His Highness, the Duke of Orleans, and no one else."

"Oh, ho!" cried the young man, "we have a grand personage to deal with, who will not take up with pages and varlets, I warrant—a chanticleer of the first crow! Sir, if you are not a cock of the lower court, perhaps it might be as well for you to vacate the premises."

"I really don't know what you mean, good youth," answered Jean Charost; "you seem to wish to insult me. But I will *give* you no occasion. You shall *make* one, if you want one; and I have only simply to warn you that his Highness last night engaged me in his service—"

"As what? As what? As what?" cried a dozen voices round him.

Jean Charost hesitated; and Juvenel de

Royans, seeing that he had gained some advantage, though he knew not well what, exclaimed, in a solemn and reproving tone—

"Silence, Messires! You are all mistaken. You think that every post in this household is filled, and therefore that there is nothing vacant for this young gentleman. But there is one post vacant, for which he is doubtless eminently qualified; namely, the honorable office of instructor of the monkeys."

"The first that I am likely to begin with is yourself," answered Jean Charost, amidst a shout of laughter from the rest; "and I am very likely to give you the commencing lesson speedily, if you do not move out of my way."

"I am always ready for instruction," replied the other, barring the passage to the house.

Jean Charost's hand was upon his collar in a moment; but the other was as strong as himself, and a vehement struggle was on the point of taking place, when a middle-aged man, who had been standing at the principal door of the

palace, came out, and thrust himself between the two youths, exclaiming—

"For shame—for shame! Ah, Master Juvenel; at your old tricks again. You know they have cost you the Duke's favor. Take care that they do not cost you something more."

"The young gentleman offered me some instruction," said Juvenel de Royans, in a tone of affected humility. "Surely, you would not have me reject such an offer, although I know not who he is, or what may be his capability of giving it."

"He's the Duke's secretary, sir," said the elder man, "and may have to give you instruction in more ways than you imagine."

"I cry his reverence's pardon, and kiss the toe of his pantoufle," said the other, nothing daunted, adding, as he looked at Jean Charost's shoes, which were cut in a somewhat more convenient fashion than the extravagant and inconvenient mode of Paris: "His *cordovanier*

has been somewhat penurious in regard to those same pantoufle toes; but my humility is all the greater."

"Come with me, sir. Come with me, and never mind the foolish boy," said the elder gentleman, taking Jean Charost's arm, and drawing him away. "I will take you to the *Maitre d'Hotel*, who will show you your apartments. The Duke will not be long absent; and, if his mind have a little recovered itself, he will soon set all these affairs to rights for you."

"Perhaps there may be some mistake," said Jean Charost, hesitating a little. "I think that you are the gentleman who introduced the Duke de Berri, about half an hour ago; but, although his Highness then gave me the name of his secretary, in speaking to that Duke, he has in no way intimated to me, personally, that I am to fill such an office, and it may be better not to assume that it is so, till I hear farther."

"Not so—not so," cried the gentleman, with

a smile; "you do not know the Duke yet; he is a man of a single word, frank and honest in all his dealings. What he says, he means. He may do more, but never less; and it were to offend him to doubt anything he has said. He called you his secretary in your presence—I heard him—and you are just as much his secretary, as if you had a patent for the place. Besides, shortly after Maitre Jacques Cœur left him yesterday evening—the first time, when he was here alone, I mean—he gave orders concerning you. I am merely a poor *ecuyer de la main;* but tolerably well with his Highness. The Maitre d'Hotel, however, knows all about it."

By this time they had reached the vestibule of the palace; and Jean Charost was conducted by his new friend through a number of turning and winding passages, which showed him that the house was much larger than he had at first believed, to a large room, where they found an old man, in a lay habit of black, but with the

crown of his head shaved, immersed in an ocean of bundles of papers, tied up with packthread.

"This is the young gentleman of whom the Duke spoke to you, Signor," said Jean's conductor; "his Highness's new secretary. You had better let him see his rooms, and take care of him till the Duke comes; for I found young Juvenel de Royans provoking him to quarrel, in the outer court."

"Ah, that youth, that youth!" ejaculated the Maitre d'Hotel, with a strong foreign accent. "He will get himself into trouble, and heaven knows the trouble he has given me. But cannot you, good Monsieur Blaize, just show the young gentleman his apartments. Here are the keys. I know it is not in your office; but I am so busy just now, and so sad, too, that you would confer a favour upon me. Then bring him back, as soon as he knows his way, and we three will dine snugly together in my other room. It is two hours past the time;

but everything has been in disorder this black day, and the Duke has gone out without any dinner at all.—Will you favour me, Monsieur Blaize?"

"With pleasure—with pleasure, my good friend," replied the old *ecuyer*, taking the two keys, which the other held out to him, and saying, in an inquiring tone: "The two rooms next the Duke's bed-room, are they not?"

"No, no. The two on this side, next the toilet-chamber," answered the other. "You will find a fire lighted there; for it is marvellous cold in this horrid climate."

Monsieur Blaize, nodding his head, led the way towards another part of the palace. Innumerable small chambers were passed, then little doors jostling each other in a long corridor, and Jean Charost began to wonder when they should stop, when a sharp turn brought them to a completely different part of the house. A wide, and curiously constructed double staircase presented itself, rising from the side of a

large vestibule in two great wings, which seemed all the way up as if they were going to meet each other at the next landing-place, but yet, taking a sudden turn, continued separate to the top of the five stories through which they ascended, and with no communication whatsoever between the several flights. Quaint and strange were the ornaments carved upon the railings and ballustrades; heads of devils, and angels, cherubim with their wings extended, monkeys playing on the fiddle, dragons with their snaky tails wound round the bones of a grinning skeleton, and Cupid astride upon a goose. In each little group there was probably some allegory, moral or satirical; but, though very much inclined, Jean Charost could not pause to enquire into the conceit which lay beneath; for his companion led the way up one of the flights with a rapid step, and then carried him along a wide passage, in which the doors were few and large, and ornamented with rich carvings but dimly seen in the ill-lighted

corridor. At the end, a little flight of six broad steps led them to another floor of the house, more lightsome and cheerful of aspect; and here they reached a large doorway, with a lantern hanging before it, and some verses carved in the wood-work upon the cornice.

Here Monsieur Blaize paused for a moment to look over his shoulder, and say:

"That is the Duke's bed-chamber, and the door beyond is his toilet-chamber, where he receives applicants while he is dressing; and now for the secretary's room."

As he spoke, he approached a little door, for no great symmetry was observed, and, applying a key to the lock, admitted his young companion into the apartments which were to be his future abode. The first room was a sort of ante-chamber to the second, and was fitted up as a writing chamber, with tables, and chairs, and stools, ink-bottles, and cases for paper; while a large open fire-place displayed the embers of a fire which had been sufficiently

large to warm the chamber. Within this room, was another, separated from it by a partition of plain oak, containing a small bed very handsomely decorated, a chair, and a table, but no other furniture, except three pieces of tapestry, representing, somewhat grotesquely, and not very decently, the loves of Jupiter and Leda. The two chambers, which formed one angle of the building, and received light from two different sides, had apparently been one in former times; but each was large enough to form a very comfortable apartment, and there was an air of habitability, if I may use the term, about them, which seemed, to the eyes of Jean Charost, the first cheerful thing he had met with since his entrance into the palace.

On the table, in the writing-room, were spots of ink of no very old date, and one article, belonging to a former tenant, had been left behind, in the shape of a sword, hanging by one of the rings of the scabbard from a nail driven

into the oaken partition. In passing through, Jean Charost paused to look at it, and the old *ecuyer* exclaimed:

"Ah, poor fellow! He will never use it again. That belonged to Monsieur de Gray, the Duke's last secretary, who was killed in a rencontre near Corbeil. Master Juvenel de Royans thought to get the post; but he had so completely lost the Duke's favour, by his rashness and indiscretion, that it was flatly refused him."

"Then probably he will be no great friend of mine," said Jean Charost, with a faint smile; "and perhaps his conduct just now had as much of malice in it as of folly."

Monsieur Blaize paused and meditated for a moment. He was at that age when the light tricks and vagaries of sportive youth are the most annoying: not old enough to dote upon the reflected image of regretted years; not young enough to feel any sympathy with the follies of another age. He was nevertheless a

very just man, and, as Jean Charost found afterwards, just in small things as well as great, in words as well as deeds.

"No," he said, thoughtfully. "No; I do not think he is one to bear malice—at all events, not long. His nature is a frank and generous one, though overlaid by much conceit and vanity, and carried away by a rash, unbridled spirit. It is probable he neither cared who or what you were, and merely resolved, in order to make the foolish boys round him laugh, that he would have what he called some sport with the stranger, without at all considering how much pain he might give, or where an idle jest might end. There are multitudes of such men in the world, and they gain, good lack! reputation of gallant, daring spirits, simply because they put themselves, and every one else, in danger, as if the continuous perilling of a hard head were really any sign of being a brave man. But we must not keep the signor's dinner waiting. It is one of his

little foibles to love his meat well done, and never drink bad wine. Your eyes appear to be seeking something. What is it you require?"

"I thought, perhaps," replied Jean Charost, "that my baggage might have been brought up here, as the apartment, it seems, was prepared for me. It must have come some time ago, I think. My horse, too, I left at the gates; and heaven knows what has become of him."

"We will inquire—we will inquire as we go," said the *ecuyer*; "but no great toilet is required here at the dinner-hour. At supper, we sometimes put on our smart attire; but, in these hazardous times, one never knows how, or how soon, the mid-day meal may be brought to an end."

Thus saying, he led towards the door, and, taking a different way back from that which he had traced in leading Jean Charost to his apartments, he paused a moment at a little dark den, shut off from one of the lower

halls by a half-door, breast high, and spoke a few words to some invisible person within.

"Stall number nineteen," growled a voice from within. "But who's to dress him? No groom—no horse-boy even!"

"We will see to that presently," replied the *ecuyer*. Then seeing a man pass along the other side of the hall, he crossed over, spoke to him for a moment or two, and, returning, informed Jean Charost that his baggage had arrived, and would be carried up to the door of his apartments before dinner was over.

On returning to the rooms of the *maitre d' hotel*, they found that high functionary emerged from his accounts, and ready to conduct them into his own private dining-room, where, by especial privilege, he took his meals with a select few, and certainly did not fare worse than his lord and master. There might be more gold on the table of the Duke of Orleans but probably less good cheer.

The *maitre d' hotel*, himself, was a sleek,

quiet specimen of Italian humanity, always exceedingly full of business, very accurate, and even very faithful; by birth, a gentleman, nominally an Ecclesiastic, fond of quiet, if not of ease, and loving all kinds of good things, without the slightest objection to a sly joke, even if the whiskers of decency, morality, or religion, were a little singed thereby. He was an exceedingly good man, nevertheless, a hater of all strife and quarrelling, though, in this respect, he had fallen upon evil days : his appearance and conduct, with his black beard, his tonsure, his semi-clerical dress, and his air of grave suavity, generally ensured him respect from all members of the Duke's household.

Two other officers, besides himself and the *ecuyer*, formed the party at dinner with Jean Charost, and everything passed with great decorum; all parties seeming to enjoy themselves amongst fat capon, snipes, rich Burgundy,

and other delicacies, far too much to waste the precious moments in idle conversation.

Jean Charost thought the dinner very dull indeed, and wondered, with a feeling of some apprehension, if his meals were always to be taken in such a solemn assembly. Peals of laughter, too, which he heard from a hall not far off, gave the gravity of the proceedings all the force of contrast. But the young gentleman soon found, that when that serious passion, hunger, was somewhat appeased, his companions could unbend a little. With the second course, a few quiet jokes began to fly about, staid and formal enough, indeed; but the gravity of the party was soon restored by Monsieur Blaize starting a subject of importance, in which Jean Charost was deeply interested. He announced, to the *maitre d' hotel*, that their young companion, not knowing the customs of the Duke's household, had brought no servant with him; and it was agreed,

upon all hands, that this was a defect to be remedied immediately.

Jean was a little puzzled, and a little alarmed at the idea of expense about to be incurred; for his education had been one of forced economy, and the thought of entertaining a servant for his own especial needs, had never entered his mind. He could only protest, however, in a subdued and anxious tone, that he knew not where or how to procure a person suitable; but, on that score, immediate assistance was offered him by the *maitre d' hotel* himself.

"I have," said he "on my books, more than a hundred and fifty names of lads, all eager to be entered upon the Duke's household, in any capacity. I will look through the list by-and-bye."

But, without giving him time to do so, every one of the gentlemen at the table hastened to mention some one whom he would be glad to

recommend, inducing Jean Charost to say to himself,

"If the post of lacquey to the Duke's secretary be so desirable, how desirable must be the post of secretary itself!"

The discussion continued during the whole of the second course, each having a good deal to say in favour of his nominee, and each a jest to launch at the person recommended by any other.

"There is Pierre Crouton," said an elderly gentleman. "He was born upon my estate, near Charenton, and a brisker, more active lad never lived. He has had good instructions too, and knows every corner of Paris, from the Bastile to the Tour de Nesle."

"Well acquainted with the little Chatelet, likewise," said Monsieur Blaize. "I have heard that the jailer's great dogs will not even bark at him. But there is Matthew Borne, the son of old James Borne, who died in the Duke's service long ago."

"Ah, poor James! When he was old, and battered to pieces, he married the pretty young grisette; and this is her son. It's a wise son that knows its own father! Pray what has become of her, Monsieur Blaize? *You* should know, if any one does."

"I know nothing about her," said the *ecuyer*, somewhat sharply. "Her son came to me, asking a recommendation. I have given him that, and that's all I know."

"Trust to me, trust to me, my young friend," said the *maitre d'hotel*, in a whisper, to Jean Charost. "I will find the lad to suit you, before night-fall. Come to me in half-an-hour, and you shall have a choice."

Jean Charost promised to follow his counsels; and, soon after, the little party broke up.

Strange is the sensation with which a young man encounters the first half-hour of solitary thought, in a new situation. Have you forgotten it, dear reader? Yes, perhaps entirely; and yet you must have experienced it at some

time. When you first went to join your regiment: when, after all the bustle, and activity, and embarrassment, and a little sheepishness, and a little pride, and a little awkwardness, perhaps, and perhaps all the casualties of the first mess dinner, you sat down in your barrack-room, not so much to review the events of the day, as to let the mind settle, and order issue out of chaos, you have felt it then: or, when you have joined a squad of lawyers' clerks, or entered a merchant's counting-house, or plunged into a strange city, or entered a new University, and passed through all the initiations, and sat down in the lull of the evening, or the dead of night, to find yourself alone—separate, not only from old, familiar faces, and things associated with early recollections, but from habitual thoughts and sensations, from family customs, and domestic habits; you must have felt it then, and experienced a solitude such as a desert itself can hardly give.

Seated in his writing-room, without turning

a thought or a look to his baggage, which had been placed at the door for himself to draw in, Jean Charost gave himself up to thought. I believe I might better say, to sensation. He *felt* his loneliness, more than thought of it; and Memory, with one of those strange vagaries in which she delights as much as Fancy, skipped at once over a period of above fourteen or fifteen months, and carried him back at once to the small chateau of Brecy, and to the frugal table in his mother's hall. The quaint, long windows, with one pointed arch within another, and two or three pale, yellow warriors of stained glass, transmitting the discolored rays upon the floor—the high-backed chair, never used since his father's death, standing against the wall, with a knob in the centre, resting against the iron *chausses* of an antiquated suit of armour—the plain oaken board in the middle of the room—and his mother and the two maids spinning in the sunniest nook, came up before his eyes, almost as plainly as they had

appeared the year and a half before. He heard the hound howling in the court-yard, and the song of the milk-maid bringing home the pail upon her head, and the carol of the bird which used to sit in March mornings on the topmost bough of an ash tree, which had rooted itself on an inner tower, somewhat neglected and dilapidated. For a moment or two he was at home again. His paternal dwelling-place formed a little picture apart in his room in the Parisian palace; and the cheerful sunshine, pouring from early associations, formed a strange and striking contrast with the sort of dark isolation which he felt around him.

The contrast, perhaps, might have been as great if he had compared the present with days more recently passed; for, in the house of Jacques Cœur, he had been, from the first, at home: but still his mind did not rest upon that time. It reverted to those earlier days; and he sat gazing on the floor, and wishing himself—notwithstanding the eagerness of youthful hope,

the buoyancy of youthful spirits, the impetuosity of youthful desires—wishing himself once more in the calm and happy bosom of domestic life, and away from splendid scenes, devoid of all warm and genial feelings, where gold and jewels might glitter and shine, but where everything was cold as the metal, and hard as the stone.

It was a boy's fancy. It was the fancy of an hour. He knew that the strangeness would soon pass away. Young as he was, he was aware that the spirit, spider-like, speedily spins out threads to attach itself to all the objects that surround it, however different to its accustomed haunts, however strange, and new, and rough, may be the points by which it is encompassed.

At length he started up, saying to himself—

"Ah, ha! the half hour must be passed." And, quitting the room, without locking the door behind him, he threaded his way through

the long passage, to the office of the *maitre d'hotel.*

The Italian seemed to have got through the labors of the day, and, seated in a large chair, with his feet in velvet slippers extended to the fire, was yielding, after the most approved method, to the process of digestion. He was neither quite awake, nor quite asleep, but in that benign state of semi-somnolence which succeeds a well-considered meal, happily disposed of. The five or ten minutes which Jean Charost was behind his time had been favorable, by enabling him to prolong his comfortable repose; and he received the young gentleman with the utmost benevolence, seating him by him, and talking to him in a quiet, low, almost confidential tone, but not at first touching upon the subject which brought his visitor there. On the contrary, his object in inviting him seemed to have been, rather to give him a general idea of the character of those by whom he was surrounded, and of what would

be expected from him by the Duke himself, than to recommend him a lacquey.

Of the Duke he spoke in high terms, as in duty bound; but of the Duchess, in higher terms still, mingling his commendations, however, with expressions of compassion, which led Jean Charost to believe that her married life was not as happy as her virtues merited. The young listener discovered that the good Signor had accompanied the Duchess from her father's court at Milan, and had an hereditary right to love and to respect her.

All the principal offices of the Duke's household were passed one by one in review by the good *maitre d'hotel;* and, although the Prince and his lady were both spoken of with profound respect, none of the rest escaped without some satirical notice, couched in somewhat sharp, though by no means bitter, terms. Even Monsieur Blaize himself was not exempt.

"He is the best, the most upright, and the most prudent man in the whole household,"

said the Signor, "just in all his proceedings, with a little sort of worldly wisdom, not the slightest tincture of letters, and a great deal of honest simplicity. Nevertheless, he is, what we call in Italy, 'an ass.'"

Such a chart of the country, when we can depend upon its accuracy, is very useful to a young man in entering a strange household. Nevertheless, Jean Charost, though grateful for the information he received, resolved to use his own eyes, and judge for himself. To say the truth, he was not at all sorry to find the good Maitre d'Hotel in a communicative mood; for the curiosity of youth had been excited by many of the events of the morning, and especially by the detention and examination which he had undergone immediately after his arrival. That some strange and terrible event had occurred, was very evident; but a profound and mysterious silence had been observed by every one he had seen in the palace regarding the facts. The subject had been carefully

avoided, and no one had even come near it in the most unguarded moment. With simple skill, he endeavoured to bring round the conversation to the point desired, and at length asked, straightforwardly, what had occurred to induce the Duke's officers to put him and several others in a sort of arrest, as soon as he had entered the gates. He gained nothing by the attempt, however.

"Ah, poor lady! Ah, sweet lady!" exclaimed the master of the hotel, in a sad tone. "But we were talking, my young friend, of a varlet fitted for your service. I have got just the very person to suit you. He is as active as a squirrel, as gay as a lark, understands all points of service for horse or man, and never asks any questions about what does not concern him—a most invaluable quality in a prince's household. If he has any fault, he is too chaste; so you must mind your morals, my young friend. His wages are three crowns a month and your cast off clothes, with any little gratuity for good

service you may like to bestow. He will be rated by the Duke's household, and nourished at his expense; but you will need a horse for him, which had better be provided as soon as possible. I advise you strongly to take him; but, nevertheless, see him first, and judge for yourself. He will be with you some time to-day. And now I must to my work again. Ah ha! It is a laborious life. Good day, my son —good day!"

Jean Charost took his leave, and departed; but he could not help thinking that his instructive conversation with the Maitre d'Hotel had been brought to a somewhat sudden close by his own indiscreet question.

CHAPTER VII.

GREAT silence, during the rest of the day, pervaded the palace of the Duke of Orleans, or at least that part of it in which Jean Charost's rooms were situated. He thought he heard, indeed, about half an hour after he had left the Maitre d'Hotel, some distant sounds in the same building, and the blast of a trumpet; but whether the latter noise proceeded from the streets, or from the outer court, he could not tell. Everything was still, however, in the corridor hard by. No one was heard passing

towards the apartments of the Duke; and the young man was rather anxious in regard to the prince's long delay. What were to be his occupations, what was expected of him, he knew not; and although he was desirous of purchasing another horse, in accordance with the hint given him by Signor Lomelini, the Maitre d'Hotel, he did not like to venture out, lest his royal employer should arrive, and require his presence.

The unpacking and arrangement of his baggage afforded him some occupation; and, when that was completed, he took out a book—a rare treasure, possessed by few in those days—and continued to read, till, as early night approached, the crooked letters of the copyist's hand began to fade upon the vellum. He was just closing the page, when a tap at the door was heard, and a short, slight young man presented himself, apparently about five-and-twenty years of age, but not much taller than a youth of fourteen or fifteen. He was dressed very

plainly in a suit of gray cloth, and the light was not sufficient to show much more; his habiliments, nevertheless, seemed to have a gay and jaunty air; and his cap, even when he held it in his hand, exhibited a sort of obliquity of direction, which showed it to be impossible ever to keep it straight upon his head.

There was no need of asking his name, or his business; for both were related in the fewest possible words before he had been an instant in the room.

"I am Martin Grille," he said; "and I have come to be hired by your lordship."

"Then I suppose you take it for granted that I shall hire you?" remarked Jean Charost, with a smile.

"Signor Lomelini sent me," replied the young man, in a confident tone.

"He sent you to see if you would suit me," rejoined Jean Charost.

"Of course," returned the young man. "Don't I?"

Jean Charost laughed.

"I cannot say," he answered. "You must first tell me what you can do."

"Everything," replied the other.

Jean Charost mused, thinking to himself that a person who could do everything was exactly the one to suit him in a situation in which he did not know what to do. He said, however, still half meditating—

"Then I think, my good friend Martin, you are just the man for me."

"Thank your lordship," returned Martin Grille, without waiting for any addition to the sentence.

Before Jean Charost could put in a single proviso, or ask another question, the door was opened, and, by aid of the light from the window in the corridor behind it, the young secretary saw a tall, dark figure entering the room. The features he could not distinguish; but there was something in the air and carriage of the new-comer, which made him instantly rise from

his seat; and, the moment after, the voice of the Duke of Orleans said—

"What, in darkness, my young friend! My people have not taken proper care of you. Who is that?"

The question applied to Martin Grille, who was retreating out of the room, as fast as his feet could carry him; and Jean Charost replied, placing a chair for the Duke—

"Merely a servant, your Highness, whom I have been engaging—an appendage which, coming from humbler dwellings, I had forgotten to provide myself with till I was here."

"Ah, these people! these people!" said the Duke. "So they have forced a servant upon you already, though there are varlets enough in this house to do double the work that is provided for them. However, perhaps it is as well. But I will see to these affairs of yours for the future. Take no such step without consulting me, and do so freely; for Jacques Cœur has interested me in you, and I look upon it that he

has rather committed you to my charge, than placed you in my service. Come hither with me into a place where there is more light. Heaven knows, my thoughts are dark enough."

Thus saying, he turned to the door, and Jean Charost followed his Highness along the corridor till they reached what had been pointed out as his toilet chamber, at the entrance of which, stood two of the Duke's attendants, who threw open the door at his approach. Still followed by Jean Charost, he passed silently between them into a large and well-lighted room, and, seating himself, fell into a deep fit of thought, which lasted several minutes.

At length he raised his head, and looked up in the young man's face for a moment or two without speaking; but then said—

"I cannot to-night. I wished to give you information and directions as to your conduct and occupations here; but my mind is very heavy, and can only deal with weighty things.

Come to me to-morrow, after mass, and you shall have some hints that may be serviceable to you. At present, sit down at that table, and draw me up a paper, somewhat similar to that which I dictated this morning, but more at large. The terms of accommodation have been accepted as to general principles; but several particulars require explanation. You will find the notes there—in that paper lying before you. See if you can put them in form without reference to me."

Jean Charost seated himself, and took up the pen; but on perusing the notes he found his task a little difficult. Had it been merely a letter on mercantile business to some citizen of Genoa or Amalfi, that he was called upon to write, the matter would have been easy; but when it was a formal proposal, addressed to the "High and Mighty Prince John, Duke of Burgundy," he found himself more than once greatly puzzled. Twice he looked up towards the Duke of Orleans; but the Duke remained

in profound thought, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes bent upon a distant spot on the floor; and Jean Charost wrote on, striving to do his best, but not certain whether he was right or wrong.

For more than half an hour the young man continued writing, and then said, in a low voice—

"It is done, your Highness."

The Duke started, and held out his hand for the paper, which he read carefully twice over. It seemed to please him; for he nodded his head to his young companion, with a smile, saying—

"Very well—better than I expected—but you must change that word—and that. Choose me something more forcible. Say, *impossible*, rather than *difficult*, and *positively*, rather than *probably*. On those points there must be no doubt left. Then make me a fair copy. It shall go this very night."

Jean Charost resumed his seat, and executed

this task also to the full satisfaction of the Duke of Orleans.

When all was complete, and the letter sealed and addressed, the Duke rang the little *clochette*, or silver bell, upon his table, and one of the attendants immediately entered. To him he gave the epistle, with directions for its transmission by a proper officer; and the man departed in silence. For a moment or two, the Duke was mute, but gazed in the face of Jean Charost, as if considering something he saw there, attentively. After a time he said to himself,

"Ay! It is as well. Get your cloak, Monsieur de Brecy," he continued. "I wish you to go a few steps with me. Bring sword and dagger with you. There, take a light, as there is none in your chamber."

The young secretary hurried away, and in two minutes returned to the Duke's door; but the attendant would not suffer him to enter till he had knocked and asked permission. When

admitted, he found the Duke equipped for going forth, his whole person enveloped in a capacious plain mantle, and his head covered with a large chaperon, or hood, which concealed the greater part of his face.

"Now follow me," he said.

Passing the attendant, to whom he gave some orders in a low voice, he led the way through that corridor and another; then descended a flight of steps, and issued out by a small door into the gardens. Taking his way between two rows of trees, he made direct for the opposite wall, opened a door in it with a key which he carried with him, and, in a moment after, Jean Charost found himself in a narrow street, along which a number of persons were passing.

"Keep close," said the Duke of Orleans, after he had closed the door.

Then advancing with a quick pace between the wall and the houses opposite, he led the way direct into the Rue Saint Antoine. The

night was clear and bright, though exceedingly cold, and the Parisian world were all abroad in the streets; but the Duke and his young companion passed unnoticed in the crowd.

At length they reached the gate of that large building, at which the young secretary had seen the man apply for admission on the preceding night; and there the Duke stopped, and rang the same bell. A wicket door was immediately opened by a man in the habit of a monk, with a lantern in his hand; and the Duke, slightly lifting his cornette or chaperon, passed in without speaking, followed by his young secretary. Taking his way across a long, stone-paved court, to the main building, he entered a large vestibule where a light was burning, and in which was found an old man busily engaged in painting, with rich hues of blue and pink and gold, the capital letters in a large vellum book. To him the Duke spoke for a moment or two, in a low tone; and the monk immediately took a lantern and led the way into the

interior of the monastery, which was much more silent and quiet than such abodes were usually supposed to be. At the end of the second passage, the little party issued forth upon a long cloister forming one side of a quadrangle, and separated from the central court by an open screen of elaborately carved stone-work. Here the old monk turned, and gave a sidelong glance at Jean Charost, lifting his lantern a little, as if to see him more distinctly. The Duke of Orleans, seeming to take this as a hint, paused for an instant, saying—

"Wait for me here, Monsieur de Brecy. I will not be long."

He then walked on, and Jean Charost was left to perambulate the cloister in solitude, and nearly in darkness. The stars, indeed, were out, and the rising moon was pouring her silvery rays upon the upper story on the opposite side of the quadrangle, peeping in at the quaint old windows, and illuminating the rich

tracery of stone. There seemed something solemn, and yet fanciful, in the picture she displayed. The cold shadows of the tall, fine pillars, and their infinitely varied capitals, the spouts sticking out in strange forms of beasts and dragons, the heads of angels and devils in various angles and at the ends of corbels, with the fine fret-work of some tall arches at one angle of the court, gave ample materials for the imagination to work with at her will, while the general aspect of the whole was gloomy, if not actually sad. The mass of buildings around, and the distance of that remote quadrangle from the street, deadened the noises of the great city, so that nothing was heard for some time but an indistinct murmur, like the softened roar of the sea.

In the building itself, all was still as death, till the slow foot-fall of a sandal was heard approaching from the side at which the Duke of Orleans had disappeared. A moment or two

after, the old monk came back with a lantern, and paused to speak a few words with the young man from the world without.

"It is a bitter cold night, my son," he said; "and the Duke tells me he has come hither with you alone. He risks too much in these evil times, methinks."

"I trust not," replied Jean Charost. "A good prince should have nothing to fear in the streets of his brother's capital."

"Ay; all men have enemies, either within or without," returned the monk; "and no man can be called good till he is in Heaven. Have you been long with the Duke, my son? He says you are his secretary."

"I have been in his Highness's service but a few hours," replied Jean Charost.

"He trusts you mightily," answered his ancient companion. "You should be grateful for his great confidence."

"I am so, indeed, father," said Jean

Charost; "but I owe his confidence to the kind recommendations of another, rather than to any merits of my own."

"Modestly answered, for one so young," rejoined the monk. "Methinks you have not been long in courts, my son. They tell me that modesty is soon lost there, as well as truth."

"I trust that I shall lose neither there," replied Jean Charost, "or I would soon betake myself far from such bad influence. I do not hold that anything a court could give, could repay a man for loss of honesty."

"Well, I know little of courts," answered the old man; "and perhaps there is scandal in the tales they tell. But one thing is certain—it is very cold; and I will betake me to my books again. Good night, my son." And he walked on.

Jean Charost began again to pace and repace the cloister, fancying, but not feeling quite sure, that he heard the murmur of voices down the passage through which the monk had taken his

way. Shortly after, he saw a tall, gray figure flit across the moonlight, which had now reached to the grass in the centre of the quadrangle. It was lost, almost as soon as seen; and no sound of steps met the young man's ear. He saw it distinctly, however, and yet a sort of superstitious awe came over him, as if the being he beheld were not of the same nature with himself. He walked on in the direction which it seemed to have taken, and, before he reached the corner of the quadrangle, saw another figure come forth from one of the passages which branched off from the cloister, and easily recognized the walk and bearing of the Duke of Orleans. But suddenly, that gray figure came between him and the Duke, and a deep-toned, hollow voice was heard to say—

"Bad man, repent, while you have yet time. Your days are numbered. The last grains of sand shake in the hour-glass; the moon will not change thrice, and find you among the living."

The Duke seemed to stagger back, and Jean Charost darted onward; but, before he reached the spot, the stranger was gone.

"Follow him not—follow him not!" cried the Duke of Orleans, catching the arm of his young secretary, who was impulsively hurrying in pursuit of the man who had put forth, what seemed to his ears, a daring threat against the brother of his King. "Follow him not; but come hither."

Taking Jean Charost's arm, he pursued his way through the long passages of the monastery to the vestibule, where sat the old monk busily illuminating his manuscript.

Till they reached that room, the Duke uttered not a word, except his brief injunction not to follow. But there he seated himself upon a bench, with a face very pale; and, beckoning up the old man, spoke to him for several moments in a low tone of voice.

"I really cannot tell," said the monk, aloud.

"We have no such brother as you describe. No one has passed here."

"He must have passed you, methinks," observed Jean Charost, unable to resist. "He came from the passage down which you went, the moment after you had left me; and I fancied I heard him speak with you."

"Not so, my son, not so," replied the monk, eagerly. "I saw no one but yourself, and spoke with no one but you."

The Duke of Orleans sat and mused for a few moments, but at last raised himself to his full height, and threw back his shoulders, as if casting off a weight; then taking the arm of Jean Charost, he quitted the convent, merely saying,

"This is very strange."

They soon reached the small postern gate in the garden wall, and entered the precincts of the palace; but, as they were approaching the building itself, the Duke paused for a moment, saying to his young companion,

"Not a word of this strange occurrence to any one. Sup in your own room, and be with me to-morrow at the hour I named."

His tone was somewhat stern, and Jean Charost made no reply, thinking, however, that he was very likely to go without his supper, as he had no one to send for it. But when he entered his room, he found matters considerably changed, probably in consequence of some orders which the Duke had given as they were going out. A sconce was lighted on the wall, and a cresset lamp hung from the ceiling by an iron chain, directly over the table. A large fire of logs was blazing on the hearth; and a moment or two after, an inferior servant entered to ask if he had any commands.

"Your own varlet, sir, will be here to-morrow," he said; "and, in the meantime, I have his Highness's commands to attend upon you."

Jean Charost contented himself with ordering some supper to be brought to him, and

asking some questions in regard to the hours and customs of the household.

After all his wants had been attended to, he retired to rest, without quitting his own room again, judging that the Duke's command to sup there had been given as a sort of precaution against any indiscretion upon his part, and implied a desire that he should not mingle with the general household that night. He knew not what the hour was, though it could not have been very late. But there was nothing to keep him awake, except a memory of the strange events of the day; and, as the light heart of youth soon shakes off such impressions, he slept readily and well.

CHAPTER VIII.

Long before the hour appointed for him to wait upon the Duke, Jean Charost was up and dressed, expecting, every moment, that the servant he had engaged would present himself; but no Martin Grille appeared. The attendant of the Duke, who had waited upon him the preceding evening, brought him a breakfast not to be despised, consisting of delicacies from various parts of France, and a bottle of no bad wine of Beaugency; but he could tell nothing of Martin Grille; and, by

the time the meal was over, the hour appointed by the Duke had arrived.

On being admitted to the prince's dressing-chamber, Jean Charost found him in his *robe de chambre*, seated at a table, writing. His face, the young man could not help thinking, was even graver and sadder than on the preceding night; but he did not raise his eyes at the secretary's entrance, and continued to write slowly, often stopping to correct or alter, till he had covered one side of the paper before him. When that was done, he handed the sheet to the young secretary, saying,

"There! Copy me that."

On taking the paper, Jean Charost was surprised to see that it was covered with verse; for he was not aware that the Duke possessed any of that talent which was afterwards so conspicuous in his son. He seated himself at the table, however, and proceeded to fulfil the command he had received, though not without difficulty; for the Duke's writing, though large

and bold, was not very distinct. The poem commenced with the following stanza—

"To will, and not to do,
Alas! how sad!
Man, and his passions too,
Are worse than mad."

Having transcribed all the stanzas, Jean presented the copy to his Highness.

"Read it, read it," said the Duke of Orleans. With some timidity, the young secretary obeyed, feeling, instinctively, how difficult it is, in reading, to give the exact emphasis intended by the writer. He succeded, however. The Duke was pleased, perhaps as much with his own verses as with the manner in which they were enunciated. But, after a few words of commendation, he fell into a gloomy fit of thought again, from which he was at length startled by the slow tolling of the bell of a neighbouring church. He raised

his eyes suddenly to the face of Jean Charost, as the sounds struck upon his ear, and gazed at him with a strange, enquiring, but sorrowful, expression of countenance, as if he would fain have asked,

"Do you know what that bell means?—Can you comprehend the feelings it begets in me?"

The young man bent his eyes gravely to the ground; and that sort of reverence which we all feel for deep grief, and the awe excited, especially in young minds, by the display of intense passion, gave his countenance an expression of sympathy and sorrow.

A moment after, the Duke started up, exclaiming,

"I cannot let her go without a look, or a tear! Come with me, my friend. Come with me. God knows I need some support, even in my wrong, and my weakness, and my punishment."

"Oh! that I could give it to you, sir!" said

Jean Charost, in a low tone. But the Duke merely grasped his arm; and, leaning heavily upon him, quitted the chamber by a door through which Jean Charost had not hitherto passed. It led into the Duke's bed-room; and from that, through what seemed a private passage, to a distant *suite* of rooms in another part of the house, the Duke proceeded with a rapid but irregular pace, while the bell was still heard tolling, seeming to make the roof shudder with its slow and heavy vibrations. Through five or six different vacant chambers, fitted up with costly decorations, but apparently long unused, the prince hurried forward, till he reached that side of the house which looked over the wall of the gardens into the Rue Saint Antoine; but there he paused before a window, and gazed forth.

Nothing was to be seen. The street was almost deserted. A youth, in a fustian jacket and wide hose, with a round cap on his head—evidently some labouring mechanic—passed

along towards the Bastile, gazing forward, with a look of stupid eagerness, and then set off running, as if to see some sight, which he was afraid would escape him. Still the bell was heard tolling slowly and solemnly, and filling the whole air with melancholy trembling.

The Duke quitted his hold of Jean Charost, and crossed his arms upon his breast, setting his teeth hard, as if there were a terrible struggle within, in which he was determined to conquer.

A moment after, a song rose up in the air—a slow, melancholy chaunt, with swelling flow, and softening cadence; now a pause; sometimes one or two voices heard alone, and then a full chorus; but all was sad and solemn, and oppressive to the spirit.

At length, a man, bearing a banner, appeared, and then two or three couples of mendicant friars, and then a small train of Celestin monks in their long flowing garments,

and then some white-robed boys, with censers, followed by priests in their robes, and then two white horses, drawing a car with a coffin upon it—a closed coffin, which was not usual in those days at the funerals of the great. Men on horseback, and on foot, followed; but Jean Charost did not clearly distinguish who or what they were. He only saw, in an indistinct and confused manner, the priests, and the boys with their censers, and the Celestins in their white gowns, and their black scapularies, and the coffin, and the flowers that strewed it even in the midst of winter; for his attention was strongly called in another direction, though he did not venture to look round.

The moment the head of the procession had appeared from beyond one of the flanking towers of the garden wall, the Duke of Orleans laid a hand upon his shoulder, and grasped him tightly, as if for support. Heavier and

heavier pressed the hand; and then the young man felt that the prince's head was bowed down, and rested upon him, while the long-drawn, struggling breath—the gasp, as if existence were coming to an end—told the terrible anguish of his spirit.

Solemn and slow the notes of the chaunt rose up, as the procession swept along before the gates of the palace; and the words of the penitent King of Israel were heard ascending to the sky, and praying the God of mercy and of power to pardon and to succour.

The grasp of the hand grew less firm, but the weight pressed heavier and heavier; and, turning suddenly round, Jean Charost cast his arm about the Duke, from an instinctive feeling that he was falling to the ground.

His face was deadly pale, and his strong limbs shook, as with an ague. Bitter tears, too, were upon his cheeks, and his lips quivered.

"Get me a chair," he said, faintly, grasping the pillar between the windows. "I feel ill. Get me a chair."

Though almost afraid to leave him lest he should fall, Jean Charost hurried to obey, brought forward one of the large arm-chairs, and, placing his hand under the Duke's arm, assisted him to seat himself in it. Then gazing anxiously in his face, he beheld an expression of deep and bitter grief, such as he had never seen before,—no, not even in his mother's face, when his father's dead body was brought back to his paternal hall. The young man's heart was touched: the distinction of rank and station, was done away in part: sympathy created a bond between him and one who was comparatively a stranger; and, kneeling at the prince's side, he kissed his hand, saying:

"Oh, sir, be comforted! Death ever strikes the dearest, and the best-beloved. It is the lot of humanity to possess but for a season that which we value most. It is a trial of our faith

to yield unrepiningly to him who lent that which he takes away. Trust, trust in God to comfort and to compensate!"

The Duke shook his head sadly.

"Trust in God!" he echoed. "Him have I offended. His laws have I broken. Young man, young man, you know not what it is to see the bitter consummation of what oneself has done—to behold the wreck one has made of happiness—the completed desolation of a life once pure, and bright, and beautiful—all done by oneself. Yes, yes!" he added, almost wildly, "I did it all! What matter the instruments—what signifies it that the dagger was not in my hand?—I was the cause of all. I tore her from a peaceful home, where she had tranquillity, if not love—I blasted her fair name—I broke up her domestic peace—I took from her, happiness—I gave her, penitence and remorse—I armed the hand that stabbed her. Mine, mine is the whole crime, though she has shared the sorrow and the punishment."

"But there is mercy, sir," urged Jean Charost. "There is mercy for all repentance. Surely, Christ died not in vain. Surely he suffered not for the few, but for the many. Surely his word is not false, his promises not idle! '*Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give ye rest.*' He spoke of the weariness of the heart, and the burdens of the spirit. He spoke to all men. He spoke to the peasant in his hut, to the king upon his throne, to the saint in his cell, to the criminal in his dungeon, to the sorrowful throughout all the earth and thoughout all time, and to you, oh prince—he spoke also unto you. Weary and heavy laden are you with your grief and your repentance; turn unto him, and he will give you rest!"

There was something in this outburst of fervid feeling on the part of Jean Charost, excited by all he had seen and heard, which went straight home to the heart of the Duke of Orleans; and,

casting his arm around him, he once more leaned his head upon his shoulder, and wept profusely. But now, the tears he shed seemed to be calmer —tears of grief, but not altogether of despair; and when he lifted his head again, the expression of deep, hopeless bitterness was gone from his face. The chaunt, too, had ceased in the street, though a faint murmur thereof was still heard in the distance.

"You have given me comfort, Jean," he said. "You have given me comfort, when none else perhaps could have done so. You are no courtier, dear boy. You have spoken, when others would have stood in cold and reverent silence. Oh, out upon the heartless forms that cut us off from our fellow men, even in the moment when the intensity of our human suffering makes us feel ourselves upon the level of the lowliest! Out upon the heartless forms that drive us to break through their barrier into the sphere of passion, as much in pursuit of human sympathies, as of mere momentary pleasures!

—Come with me, Jean. It is over—the dreadful moment is past. I will seek Him to whom thou hast pointed: I will seek comfort there. But, on this earth, the hour just past has forged a tie between thee and me which can never be broken. Now I can understand how thou hast won so much love and confidence. It is that thou hast some heart, where all, or almost all, are heartless."

Thus saying, he raised himself with the aid of the young man's arm, and walked slowly back to his own apartments by the same way he had come.

When they had entered his toilet-chamber, the Duke cast himself in a chair, saying:

"Now, leave me, De Brecy; but be not far off. I need not tell you not to speak of anything you have seen. I know you will not. I will send for you soon; but I must have time for thought."

Jean Charost withdrew, and sought his own room; but it is not to be denied that the mo-

ment was a perilous one for his favour with the Duke of Orleans. It is a very dangerous thing to witness the weakness of great men, or those emotions which they look upon as weaknesses. Pride, vanity, doubt, fear, suspicion, all whisper hate against those who can testify that princes are not so strong as the world supposes. Alas, that it should be so! But so it is; and it was but by a happy quality in the mind of the Duke of Orleans, the native frankness and generosity of his disposition, that Jean Charost escaped the fate of so many who have witnessed the secret emotion of princes. Happily for himself, he knew not that there was any peril, and felt, though in a different sense, that, as the Prince had said, there was a new tie between him and his Royal master.

CHAPTER IX.

At the corner of a street, on the island which formed the first nucleus round which gathered the great city of Paris, was a small booth protruding from a little, ill-favored house, about three or four hundred yards from the church of Notre Dame. This booth consisted merely of a coarse wooden shed, open in front, and only covered by rough, unsmoothed planks, while, upon a rude table, or counter, running along the front, appeared a number of articles of cut-

lery, knives, great rings, and other iron ware, comprising the daggers worn, and often used in a sanguinary manner, by the lower order of citizens; for, though the possessor of the stall was not a regular armourer by profession, he did not think himself prohibited from dealing in the weapons employed by his own class. Written in white chalk upon a board over the booth, were the words—

"SIMON, dit CABOCHE, Maitre Coutellier."

Behind the table on which his goods were displayed, appeared the personage to whom the above inscription referred; a man of forty-five or forty-six years of age, tall, brawny, and powerful, with his huge arms bare up to the elbows, notwithstanding the severity of the weather. His countenance was anything but prepossessing; and yet there was a certain commanding energy in the broad, square forehead and massive under-jaw, which spoke, truly enough, the character of the man, and obtained for him considerable influence with people of his own class. Yet

he was potently ugly: his cheek-bones were high, and prominent; his eyes small, fierce, and flashing; and his nose turned up in the air, as if in contempt of everything below it. His skin was so begrimed with dirt, that its original color could with difficulty be distinguished; but it was probably of that dark, saturnine brown which seldom looks completely clean; for his hair was of the stiff, black, bristly nature which usually goes with that complexion.

Limping about in the shop beside him, was a creature which even youth—usually so full of its own special charms—could not render beautiful or graceful. Nature seemed to have stamped upon it, from its birth, the most repulsive marks. It was a boy of ten or twelve years old, though his eyes hardly reached above the table on which the cutler's goods were displayed; but, by a peculiarity, not uncommon, the growth which should have been upright, had, by some obstacle, been forced to spread out laterally; and the shoulders, ribs,

and hips, were as broad as those of a grown man. The back was humped, though not very distinctly so; the legs were short, but one was shorter than the other; and one eye was defective, not from accident, but from birth. So short, so stout, so squared, was the whole body, that it looked more like a cube, with a large head and very short legs, than a human form; yet, though the gait was awkward and unsightly to the eye, that little creature was possessed of singular activity and of very great strength, notwithstanding his deformity.

It was a curious thing to see the father and the son standing together; the one with his great, powerful, well-developed limbs, and the other with his squat form. You could hardly believe that the one was the offspring of the other. Yet so it was. Maitre Simon was the father of that deformed dwarf, whose appearance would have been quite sufficient to draw the hooting boys of Paris after him, when he appeared in the streets, had not the vigor and

unmerciful severity of his father's arm kept in awe even the little vagabonds of the most turbulent city in the world.

That which might seem most strange, though in reality it was not so at all, was the doating fondness of the stern, powerful father for that mis-shapen child. It seems a rule of nature, that, where she refuses to any one the personal attractions which, often undeservedly, command regard, she places in the bosom of some other kindred being, that strong affection which generously gives the love for which there seems so little claim.

The father and the son had obtained, first from the boys of the town, and then from elder people, the nicknames of the "Big Caboche," and the "Little Caboche;" and, with a good humor, very common in France, they had themselves adopted these *sobriquets* without offence; so that the cutler was constantly addressed by his companions merely as *Caboche*, and had even placed that name over his door. During the hours

when he tended his shop, or was engaged in the manual labors of his trade, the boy was almost always his companion, limping round him, making observations upon everything, and enlivening his father's occupations by a sort of pungent wit, perhaps a little smacking of buffoonery, which, if not a gift, could be no where so well acquired as in the streets of Paris, and in which the hard spirit of the cutler greatly delighted.

Nevertheless, the characters of the father and the son were not less strongly in contrast, than their corporeal frames. Notwithstanding an occasional moroseness and acerbity—perhaps engendered by a sad comparison of his own physical powers with those of others of his age—there was in the boy's nature a fund of kindly sympathies and gentle affections, which characterized his actions more than his words; and, as we all love contrasts, the secret of his father's strong affection for him might be, in part, the opposition between their several dispositions.

The time at which these two persons are brought before the reader, was about three o'clock in the day, the hour when Parisians are most abroad. But the cold kept many within doors, and no one had stopped at the booth to buy.

"Trade is ruined," said Big Caboche, in a grumbling tone. "No business is doing. The King's sickness, and his brother's influence, have utterly destroyed the trade of the city. Armourers, and embroiderers, and dealers in idle goldsmith's work, may make a living; but no one else can gain his bread. There has not been a single soul in the shop this morning, except an old woman who wanted an axe to cut her meat because it was frozen."

"My father," replied the boy, "it was not the King, nor the Duke of Orleans, that made the Seine freeze, or pinched old Joaquim's nose, or burned old Jeannette's flannel coat, or kept any of the folks in who would have been out if it had not been so cold. Don't you see there is nobody in the street but those who have only

one coat, and that a thin one? They come out, because the sunshine is better than no shine at all; and, though they put their hands in their pockets, they won't draw them out, because you won't let them have goods without money, and they have not money to buy goods. But here comes cousin Martin, as fine as a popinjay. It must have snowed feathers, I think, to have clothed his back so gaily."

"Ah, the scapegrace!" exclaimed Caboche. "I should think that he had just been plundering some empty-headed master, if my pot had not reason to know that he has had no master to plunder for these last three months. Well, Master Never-do-well. What brings you here in such smart plumes? Violet, and yellow, with a silver lace, upon my life! If you are so fully fledged, methinks you can pick up your own grain without coming to mine."

"And so I can, and so I will, uncle," replied our friend, Martin Grille, pausing at the entrance of the booth to look at himself from head to foot, in evident admiration of his own ap-

pearance. "Did you ever see anything fit better? Upon my life it is a perfect marvel that any man should ever have been made so perfectly like me as to have worn these clothes before, without the slightest alteration! Nobody would believe it."

"Nobody will believe they are your own, cousin Martin," said the deformed boy, with a grin.

"But they *are* my own, Petit Jean," answered Martin Grille, with a very grand air; "for I have bought them, and paid for them; and though they may have been stolen for aught I know, before I had them, I had no hand in the stealing—*Foi de valet.*"

"Ah," said Caboche, dryly. "Men always gave you credit for more ingenuity than you possess, and they will in this instance also. I always said you were a good-humoured, foolish, hair-brained lad, without wit enough to take a bird's nest, or bamboozle a goose. But people would not believe me, even when you were clad

in hodden gray. What will they think now, when you dance about in silk and broadcloth?"

"Why they'll think, good uncle, that I have all the wit they imagined, and all the honesty you knew me to have. But I'll tell you all about it, that my own relations, at least, may have cause to glorify themselves."

"Get you gone—get you gone!" cried the cutler, in a rough, but not ill-humoured, tone. "I don't want to know how you got the clothes."

"Tell *me*, Martin, tell *me*," said the boy. "I should like to hear, of all things. Perhaps I may get some in the same way, some day."

"Mayhap," answered Martin Grille, seating himself on a bench, and kindly putting his arm round the deformed boy's neck. "Well, you must know, Petit Jean, that there is a certain Signor Lomelini, who is Maitre d'Hotel to his Highness the Duke of Orleans—"

Big Caboche growled out a curse between his

teeth; for, while pretending to occupy himself with other things, he was listening to the tale all the time, and the Duke of Orleans was with him an object of that strange, fanciful, prejudiced hatred, which men of inferior station very often conceive, without the slightest cause, against persons placed above them.

"Well, this Signor Lomelini—"

"There, there!" cried Caboche. "We know all about that long ago. How his mule put its foot into a hole in the street, and tumbled him head-over-heels into the gutter, and you picked him out, and scraped and wiped him, and took him back clean and sound, though desperately frightened, and a little bruised. We recollect all about that, and what gay day-dreams you built up, and thought your fortune made. Has he recollected you, at last, and given you a cast-off suit of clothes? He has been somewhat tardy in his gratitude, and niggardly too."

"All wrong, uncle mine. All wrong!" re-

plied Martin Grille, laughing. "There has been hardly a day that I have not seen him since; and when I haven't dined with you, I have dined at the Hotel d' Orleans. He found out what *you* never found out; that I was dexterous, serviceable, and discreet: and many has been the little job, which required despatch and secrecy, which I have done for him."

"Ay; dirty work, I trow," growled Caboche. But Martin Grille proceeded with his tale, without heeding his uncle's accustomed interruptions.

"Well, Signor Lomelini always promised," he said, "to get me rated on the Duke's household. There was a prospect for a penniless lad, Petit Jean!"

"As well get you posted in the Devil's kitchen," said Caboche, "and make you Satan's turnspit."

"But are you placed—but are you placed?" cried the deformed boy, eagerly.

"You shall hear all in good time," an-

swered Martin Grille. "He promised, as I have said, to get me rated as soon as there was any vacancy; but the devil seemed in all the people. Not one of them would die, except old Angelo, the squire of the stirrup, and Monsieur de Gray, the Duke's secretary. But those places were far too high for me."

"I see not why they should be," observed the deformed boy, "except that the squire is expected to fight at his Lord's side, and the secretary to write for him; and I fancy, cousin Martin, thou dost make as bad a hand at the one as the other."

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted Caboche; "he hit thee there, Martin."

"On my life, I don't know," remarked Martin Grille; "for I never tried either. However, yesterday afternoon, the Signor sent for me, and told me that the Duke had got a new secretary—quite a young man, who knew very little of life, less of Paris, and nothing of a court; that this young gentleman had got

no servant, and wanted one; that he had recommended me, and that I should be taken if I could recommend myself. I went to him in the grey of the evening, to set off my apparel the better; but I found the youth not quite so pastoral as I expected; and he began to ask me questions. Questions are very troublesome things, and answers still more so; so I made mine as short as possible."

"And he engaged you!" cried the boy, eagerly.

"On my life, I can hardly say that," replied Martin Grille. "But the Duke of Orleans himself just happened to come in at the nick of time, when I was beginning to get a little puzzled. So I thought it best to take it for granted I *was* engaged; and, making my way, as fast as possible, out of the august presence of my master, and my master's master, I went away to Signor Lomelini, and told him I was hired, all through his influence. So then he patted me on the shoulder, and

called me a brave lad. He told me, moreover, to get myself put in decent costume, and wait upon the young gentleman early the next morning."

"Ay! that's the question," cried Caboche. "Where did you get the clothes? Did you steal them from your new master the first day? for you will not say that Lomelini gave them to you. If so, men have belied him."

"No," said Martin, in an exceedingly doubtful tone. "No—I can't say he exhibits his money. What his own coin is made of, I cannot tell. I never saw any of it, that I know of. He pays out of other men's pockets, though; and he has been as good as his word with me."

"How so—how so?" asked the cutler.

"Why, you must know," answered Martin, with an important air, "that every servant in the Duke's house is rated on the Duke's household. Each gentleman, down to the very pages, has one or more valets, and they are all on the household-book. To prevent excess, how-

ever, and with a paternal solicitude to keep them out of debt, the *maitre d'hotel* takes upon himself the task of paying all the valets, sending in to the treasurer a regular account against each master, every month, to be deducted from his own salary; and, as it is the custom to give earnest to a valet when he is engaged, I persuaded the signor to advance me a sufficient number of crowns to carry me on silver wings to a frippery shop."

"Where you spent the last penny, Cousin Martin," said the deformed boy, with a sly smile.

"No, I did not, Petit Jean," replied Martin Grille; "for I brought one whole crown to you. There, my boy. You are a good lad, and I love you dearly, though you do break your sharp wit across my hard head sometimes. Take it, take it!"

The boy looked as if he would very much like to have the crown, but still put it away from him, with fingers itching as much to clutch it as Cæsar's on the lupercal.

"Take it," repeated Martin Grille. "I owe your father much more than that."

"You owe me nothing," interposed Caboche, gruffly; and then added, in a softened tone, as he saw how eagerly the boy looked at the piece of money. "You may take it, my son. That will show Martin, that I really think he owes me nothing. What I have given him was given for blood relationship, and what he gives you is given in the same way."

The boy took it, exclaiming—

"Thank you, Martin. Thank you. Now I will buy me a viol of my own; for neighbour Pierrot says I spoil his, just because I make it give out sounds that he can't."

"Ay, thou hadst always a hankering after music," said Martin Grille. "Be diligent—be diligent, Petit Jean, and play me a fine tune on your fiddle at my return; for we are all away to-morrow morning by the crow of the cock."

"Where to? where to?" exclaimed Ca-

boche, eagerly. "More wrangling towards, I warrant. Some day I shall have to put on the *salad* and corslet myself; for this strife is ruining France; and if the Duke of Orleans will not let his noble cousin of Burgundy save the country, all good men must join to force him."

"Ay, ay, uncle. You always take a leap in the dark when the Duke of Orleans' name is mentioned. There's no wrangling, no quarrelling, no strife. All is peace and good will between the two Dukes; and this is no patched-up business, but a regular treaty, which will last till you are in your grave, and Petit Jean is an old man. We shall see bright days yet, for all that's come and gone. But the truth is, the Duke is ill; and this business being happily settled, he goes off for his Castle of Beauté to-morrow, to have a little peace and quiet."

"Ill! what makes him ill?" asked the cutler. "If he had to work from morning till night to get a few *sous*, or to stand here in this

cold shop all day long, with nobody coming in to buy, he'd have a right to be ill. But he has everything he wants, and more than he ought to have. What makes him ill ?"

"Ah, that I can't say," answered Martin Grille. "Something has gone wrong in the household, and he has been very sad; but great men's servants may use their eyes, but must hold their tongues. God mend us all !"

"Much need of it," observed Caboche, "and him first. Well, I would rather be a rag-picker out of the gutter than one of your discreet, see-everything, say-nothing serving-men —your curriers of favor—your silent, secret depositories of other men's wickedness. What I see, I must speak; and what I think, too. It is the basest part of pimping to stand by and say nothing. Out upon such a trade !"

"Well, uncle, every one loves his own best," rejoined Martin Grille. "I, for instance, would not make knives for people to cut each

other's throats with. But, for my part, I think the best plan is for each man to mind his own business, and not to care what other people do. I have no more business with my master's secrets than with his purse; and if he trusts either one or the other with me, my duty is to keep them safely."

By his tone, Martin Grille seemed a little nettled; but the rough cutler only laughed at him, saying—

"Mind you do that, nephew of mine, and you will be the very prince of valets. I never knew one who would not finger the purse, or betray a secret, if occasion served. But thou art a Phœnix in thy way; so God speed thee, and keep thee honest."

"I say Amen!" ejaculated Martin Grille, turning to leave the booth. "I only came to wish you both good bye; for when a man once sets out from Paris, there is no knowing when he may return."

"Oh, he is certain to come back some time," rejoined the cutler. "Paris is the centre of all the world, and everything is drawn towards it by a force not to be resisted. So fare you well, my good nephew; and let us see you when you come back."

Martin promised to visit the cutler and his son as soon as he returned; and then sauntered away, feeling himself as fine in his new clothes, as a schoolboy in a holiday suit.

The cutler resumed his labour: but could not forbear some grumbling observations upon valets and valetry, which perhaps he might have spared, had he understood his nephew's character rightly.

About a quarter of an hour, however, after the young man had left the shop, a letter, neatly tied and sealed, was brought by a young boy, apparently one of the choristers of some great church or cathedral. It was addressed—

"To Martin Grille."

Whatever might be his curiosity, Caboche did not venture to open the epistle; but sent the lad on to the palace of the Duke of Orleans, telling him he would find his nephew there.

CHAPTER X.

I KNOW few things more pleasant than a stroll through Paris, as I remember it, in a fine, early winter's morning. There is an originality about the people whom one sees abroad at that period of the day—a gay, cheerful, pleasant originality—which is not met with in any other nation. Granted that this laughing semblance is but the striped skin of the tiger, and that underneath lies a world of untameable ferocity which makes the cat-like creature dangerous to play with. Yet still the effect is an agreeable

one—one that the mind's eye rests upon with sensations of pleasure. The sights, too, have generally something to interest or to amuse—very often something that moved the feelings, but more generally something having a touch of the burlesque in it, exciting a smile, though seldom driving one into a laugh.

Doubtless, the same was the case on the morning when the Duke of Orleans and his household set out from his brother's capital; for the Parisians have always been Parisians, and the world, as far as history shows us, has always meant one thing. It was very early in the morning, too. The sun hardly tipped the towers of Notre Dame, or gilded the darker and more sombre masses of the Chatelet. The most matutinal classes: the gatherers of rags: the unhappy beings who pilfered daily from unfastened doors, or open entries: the peasants coming into the market: the labourers going out with axe or shovel: the roasters of chestnuts (coffee was then unknown), were all astir;

and many a merry cry, to wake slumbering cooks and purveyors, was heard along the streets of the metropolis. All was cheerful, except when ferocious.

The population of Paris was that day in gayer mood than usual; for the news that a reconciliation had taken place between the Dukes of Orleans and Burgundy, whose feuds had become wearisome, as well as detrimental, had spread far and wide during the preceding evening; and men anticipated prosperous and peaceful times after a long period of turbulence and disaster. Seldom had the Duke of Orleans gone forth from the metropolis in such peaceful array. Sometimes he had galloped out in haste, with a small body of attendants, hardly enough in number to protect his person. Sometimes he had marched forward in warlike guise, to do battle with the enemy. But now he proceeded quietly in a horse-litter, feeling himself not very well, but not very ill. His saddle-horse, some pages, squires, and a few

men-at-arms, followed closely; and the rest of the attendants, who had been selected to go with him, came after, in little groups, as they mounted, two or three at a time. The whole cavalcade did not consist of more than fifty persons—no great retinue for a prince of those days; yet in its straggling disorder it made a pretty long line through the streets, and excited a good deal of attention in the multitude as it passed. But the distance to the gate was not long; and the whole party soon issued forth, through the very narrow suburbs which then surrounded the city, into the open country beyond.

To tell the truth, though the whole land was covered with the white garment of winter, it was a great relief to Jean Charost to find his sight no longer bounded by stone walls, and his lungs no longer oppressed by the heavy air of a great city. The sun sparkling on the snow, the branches of the trees encrusted with frost, the clear, blue sky without a cloud, the river

bridged with its own congealed waters, all reminded him of early days and happy hours, and filled his mind with the memory of rejoicing.

One or two of the elder and superior officers of the Duke's household had mounted at the same time with himself, and were riding along close by him. But there was no sympathetic tie between them. They were old, and he was young. They were hackneyed in courts, and he was inexperienced. They were accustomed to all the doings of the household in which he dwelt, and to him everything was fresh and new. Thus they soon gathered together, though they were perfectly courteous and polite to the Duke's new secretary; for by this time he was known to all the Duke's attendants in that capacity, and the more politic heads shrewdly calculated upon his acquiring, sooner or later, considerable influence with their princely master. Bnt they talked amongst themselves of things they knew and understood, and of which he was utterly ignorant; so that

he was suffered to ride on with uninterrupted thoughts, enjoying the wintry beauty of the landscape, while they talked of what had happened at Saint Denis, or of the skirmish at Toul, or of the march into Aquitaine, or gossipped a little scandal of Madame de —— and Monsieur de ——.

Insensibly the young man dropped a little behind, and might be said to be riding alone, when an elderly man in the habit of a priest ambled up to his side on a sleek, well-fed mule. His hair was very white, and his countenance calm and benignant; but there was no very intellectual expression in his face, and one might have felt inclined to pronounce him, at the first glance, a very simple, good man, with more rectitude than wit, more piety than learning. There would have been some mistake in this; for Jean Charost soon found that he had read much, and studied earnestly, supplying by perseverance and labour all that was wanting in acuteness.

"Good morning, my son," said the old man,

in a frank and familiar tone. "I believe I am speaking to Monsieur de Brecy, am I not? His Highness's secretary?"

"The same, sir," replied Jean Charost; "though I have not been long in that office."

"I know, I know," rejoined the priest; "you were commended to his favor by my good friend Jacques Cœur. I was absent from the palace till last night, or I would have seen you before. I am his Highness's chaplain and director—would to heaven I could direct him right! But these great men—"

There he stopped as if feeling himself treading upon dangerous ground, and a pause ensued; for Jean Charost gave him no encouragement to go on in any discussion of the Duke's doings, of which probably he knew as much as his confessor, without any great amount of information either.

The priest continued to jog on by his side, however, turning his head very frequently, as if afraid of being pursued by something. Once

hr muttered to himself, "I do believe he is coming on;" and then added a moment after, in a relieved tone, "No, it is Lomelini."

They had not ridden far after this exclamation, when they were joined by the Maitre d'Hotel, who seemed on exceedingly good terms with the chaplain, and rather in a merry mood.

"Ah, Father Peter!" he exclaimed, "you passed me in such haste that you would neither see nor hear me. What was it lent wings to your mule?"

"Oh, that fool, that fool!" cried the good father; "he has got on a black cloak like yours, signor—stolen it from some one, I dare say—and he declares he is a Doctor of the University, and must needs chop logic with me."

"What was his thesis—what was his thesis?" asked Lomelini, laughing. "He is grand at an argument, I know; and I have often heard him declare that he likes to spoil a Doctor of Divinity."

"It was no thesis at all," answered Father

Peter; "he propounded a question for debate, and asked me which of the seven capital sins was the most capital. I told him they were all equally heinous; but he contended that could not be, and he would prove it by a proposition divided into three parts, and three members, each part divided into six points."

"Let us hear," cried Lomelini. "Doubtless his parts and points were very amusing. Let us hear them by all means."

"Why, I did not stay to hear them myself," replied Father Peter. "He began by defining, and explaining the seven capital sins; but, fearing some greater scandal, (for all the boys were roaring with laughter) I rode on and left him."

"Ah, father, father! He will protest that he has defeated you in argument," said Lomelini; and then added, with a sly glance at Jean Charost, "the sharpest weapon in combat with a grave man is a jest."

The good father looked quite distressed, as if

to be defeated in argument, even by a fool, were really a serious disgrace. With the natural kindness of youth, Jean Charost felt for him; and, turning the conversation, proceeded to enquire of the Maitre d'Hotel, who and what was the person who had driven the chaplain so rapidly from the field.

"Oh, you will become well acquainted with him by and bye, my son," answered Lomelini, who still assumed a sort of paternal and patronizing air towards the young secretary; "they call him the Seigneur André in the household, and his lordship makes himself known to everybody—sometimes not very pleasantly. He is merely the Duke's fool, however, kept more for amusement than for service, and more for fashion even than amusement, for at bottom he is a dull fellow; but he contrives occasionally to stir up the choler of the old gentleman, and, when the Duke is in a gay humor, makes him laugh at Father Peter's anger."

"To be angry with a fool is to show oneself

little better than a fool, methinks," observed Jean Charost. But Lomelini shook his head, with his usual quiet smile, saying—

"Do not be too sure that he will not provoke *you*, Monsieur de Brecy. He has a vast fund of malice, though no great fund of wit; and, as you may see, can contrive to torment very grave and reverend personages. I promised you a hint from time to time, and one may not be thrown away in regard to Seigneur André. There are two or three ways of dealing with him, which are sure to put him down. First, the way which our good friend, Monsieur Blaize, takes: never to speak to him at all. When he addresses any of his witticisms to our friend, Monsieur Blaize stares quietly in his face, as if he spoke to him in an unknown tongue, and takes care not to give him a single word as a peg to hang a rejoinder upon. Another way, is, to break his head, if he be over saucy; for he is mightily careful of his person, and has never attacked young Juvenel

de Royans since he cuffed him, one morning, to his heart's content. He has no reverence for anything, indeed, but punishment and fisticuffs. He ventured, at first, to break his jests on me, for whom, though a very humble personage, his Highness's officers generally have some respect."

"May I ask how you put a stop to this practice?" inquired Jean Charost.

"Oh! very easily," replied the *Maitre d' hotel.* "I quietly listened to all he had to say; answered him as best I might, a little to the amusement of the by-standers; and did not fare altogether ill in the encounter; but Seigneur André found his supper somewhat scanty and poor that night. He had a small loaf of brown bread, a pickled herring, and some very sour wine. Though it was all in order, and he had 'wine, fish, and bread,' according to the regulations of the household, he thought proper to complain to the master cook. The cook told him that all his orders

were taken from me. He did not know what to make of this; but was very peaceable for a day or two afterwards, when he forgot his lesson, and began his impertinence again. He had another dose that night of brown bread, salt herring, aud vinegar; and it made so deep an impression on his mind, that he has not forgotten it yet."

"Well, I do think it is impious," said Father Peter, in a tone of melancholy gravity. "I do indeed."

"What! to give a fool a pickled herring as a sort of corrective of bad humours?" asked Lomelini.

"No, no," replied the chaplain, peevishly. "But to keep such poor benighted creatures in great houses for the purpose of extracting merriment from their infirmities. It is making a mockery of the chastisement of God."

"Pooh, pooh!" ejaculated Lomelini. "What can you do with them? If you did not keep them in great houses, you would be obliged to

shut them up in little ones; and I will answer for it, Seigneur André would rather be kept as a fool in the palace of the Duke of Orleans, than pent up as a madman in the hospital. But here he comes to answer for himself."

"Then I won't stay to hear him," cried the chaplain, putting his mule into a quicker pace, and riding on after the litter of the Duke of Orleans, which was not above two hundred yards in advance.

"There he goes!" exclaimed Signor Lomelini. "Poor man! This fool is a complete bug-bear to him. To Father Peter he is like a gnat, or a great fly, which keeps buzzing about our ears all night, and gives us neither peace nor rest."

As he spoke, the personage, who had been so long the subject of their conversation, rode up, presenting, to the eyes of Jean Charost, a very different sort of man from that which he had expected to see, and, in truth, a very different personage altogether from the poetical idea of

the jester, which has been furnished to us by Shakespeare and others. Seigneur André, indeed, was not one of the most famous of his class, and he has neither been embalmed in fiction, nor enrolled in history. The exceptions I believe, in truth, have been taken generally for the types; and, if we could trace the sayings and doings of all the jesters downwards, from the days of Charlemagne, we should find that nine out of ten were very dull people indeed. His Lordship was a fat, gross-looking man, of the middle age, with a countenance expressive of a good deal of sensuality—dull and heavy looking, with a nose glowing with wine, bushy, over-hanging eyebrows, and a fat, liquorish underlip. His stomach was large and protuberant, and his legs short; but still he rode his horse with a good, firm seat, though with, what seemed to the eyes of Jean Charost, a great deal of affected awkwardness of manner. There was an expression of fun and joviality about his face, it is true, which was a very

good precursor to a joke, and, like the sauce of a French cook's composing which often gives zest to a very insipid morsel, made many a dull jest pass for wit. His fun, indeed, had occasional fire in it—wild, wandering, mysterious—lighted up and going out on a sudden, which, to a physician, might probably have indicated the existence of some degree of mental derangement; but which, with ordinary persons, served, at once, to excite and puzzle curiosity.

"Ah! reverend Signor," he exclaimed, as he pulled up his horse by Lomelini's side, "I am glad to find you so far in advance. It betokens that all good things of life will be provided for—that we shall not have to wait three hours at Juvisy for dinner, or be treated with goats' flesh and rye-bread, sour wine and stale salad."

'That depends upon circumstances, Seigneur André," replied Lomelini. "That his Highness shall have a good dinner, I have provided for; but, good faith, the household must look

out for themselves. In any other weather, you would find eggs enough, and the water is generally excellent, but now it is frozen. Let me introduce you to Monsieur de Brecy, his Highness's secretary."

"Ha! I kiss his fingers," cried the jester. "I asked for him all yesterday, hearing of his advent, but not blessed with his presence. They told me he was in the nursery, and verily he seems a blessed babe. May I enquire how old you are, Monsieur de Brecy?"

"Like yourself, Seigneur André," replied Jean Charost, with a smile; "old enough to be wiser."

"Marvellous well answered," exclaimed the jester. "The dear infant is a prodigy. Did you ever see anything like that?" he continued, throwing back his black cloak, and exhibiting his large stomach, dressed in his parti-colored garments, almost resting on the saddle bow.

"Yes, often," answered Jean Charost. "I

have seen it in men too lazy to keep down the flesh, too fond of good things to refrain from what is killing them, and too dull in the brain to let the wit ever wear the body."

A sort of wild, angry fire came up in the jester's face; and he rejoined—

"Let me tell you, there is more wit in that stomach than ever you can digest."

"Perhaps so," retorted Jean Charost. "I doubt not in the least you have more brains under your belt than under your cap; but they are somewhat soft, I should think, in both places."

Signor Lomelini laughed; but at the same time made a sign to his young companion to forbear, saying, in a low tone—

"He won't forgive you easily, already. Don't provoke him farther. Here we are coming to that accursed hill of Juvisy, Seigneur André. Don't you see the town lying down there, like an egg in the nest of a long-tailed tit-mouse?"

"Or like a bit of sugar left at the bottom of a bowl of mulled wine," added the jester. "But, be it egg, or be it sugar, the horses of his Highness seem inclined to get at it very fast."

His words first called the attention of both Lomelini and Jean Charost to what was going on before them; and the latter perceived, with dismay that the horses in the litter—a curious and ill-contrived sort of vehicle—which had been going very slowly till they reached the top of the high hill of Juvisy, had begun to trot, and afterwards to canter, and were then in high course towards a full gallop. The man who drove them, walking at the side, was running after them as fast as he could go, and apparently shouting to them to stop, though his words were as unheeded by the horses as unheard by Jean Charost.

"Had we not better ride on, and help?" asked the secretary, eagerly.

Lomelini shrugged his shoulders, replying,

with a sort of fatalism hardly less ordinary in Italians than in Turks,

"What will be, will be."

The jester remarked—

"Good faith, though they call me fool, yet I have as much regard for my skin as any of them: so *I* shall not trot down the hill."

Jean Charost hardly heard the end of the sentence; for he saw that the horses of the litter were accelerating their pace at every instant, and he feared that some serious accident would happen. The Duke was seen, at the same moment, to put forth his head, calling sharply to the driver; and the young secretary, without more ado, urged on his horse at the risk of his own neck, and, taking a little circuit which the broadness of the road permitted, tried to reach the front horse of the litter, without scaring him into greater speed. He passed two groups of the Duke's attendants before he came near the vehicle; but all seemed to take as much, or as little, interest in their master's

safety as Lomelini and the jester, uttering, as the young man passed, some wild exclamations of alarm at the Duke's peril, but taking no means to avert it.

Jean Charost did not pause to stop or to enquire, however, but dashed on, passed the litter, and got in front of the horses, just at the moment that one of them stumbled and fell.

There was a steep, precipitous descent over the hill-side, as the old road ran, down which there was the greatest possible risk of the vehicle being thrown; but luckily one of the shafts broke, and Jean Charost was in time to prevent the horse from doing any farther damage, as he sprang up from his bleeding knees.

While the young man, having sprung to the ground, held him tightly by the bridle, the driver, and half-a-dozen attendants, hurried up, and assisted the Prince to alight. Their faces were now pale and anxious enough; but the

countenance of the Duke himself was as calm and tranquil as if he had encountered no danger. Lomelini and the jester were soon upon the spot; and the latter thought fit to remark, with a sagacious air, that haste spoilt speed.

"Your Highness went too fast," he said; "and this young gentleman went faster still. *You* were likely to be at the bottom of the hill of Juvisy before you desired it, and *he* had nearly sent you thither sooner, in trying to stop you."

"You are mistaken, Seigneur André," said the Duke, gravely. "The horse fell before he touched it; and, even had it not been so, I would always rather see too much zeal than too little. He came in time, however, to prevent the litter going over."

Two of the squires instantly led forward their horses for the prince to ride, as the litter, in its damaged state, was no longer serviceable. But the Duke replied:

"No, I will walk. Give me your arm, De Brecy. It is but a step now."

The little accident which had occurred, undoubtedly served to confirm Jean Charost in the favour of the Duke of Orleans; but at the same time it made him a host of enemies. The tenants of a wasp's nest are probably not half as malicious as the household of a great man. The words of the jester had given them their cue, and the report ran through all the little cavalcade that Jean Charost had thrown the horse down in attempting to stop it.

CHAPTER XI.

THERE are periods in the life of man during which accidents, misadventures, annoyances even, if they be not of too great magnitude, are of service to him. When, from within, or from without, some dark vapour has risen up, clouding the sun-light, and casting the soul into darkness—when remorse, or despair, or bitter disappointment, or satiety, or the dark pall of grief, has overwhelmed everything, and left us in a sort of twilight where we see every surrounding thing in gloom—we bless the gale,

even though it be violent, that arises to sweep the tempest-cloud from our sky. Still greater is the relief when anything of a gentler and happier kind comes along with the breeze, that dispels the mists and darkness, like a sun-gleam through a storm.

The accident which had occurred, and the escape from danger, did a great deal to rouse the Duke of Orleans from a sort of apathetic heaviness which had hung upon him for the last two or three days.

Dinner had been prepared for him at the great inn at Juvisy; but, with one of those whims in which high and mighty princes indulged frequently in those days, he paused before the gates of the old abbey, on the left side of the road, saying, in a low tone to Jean Charost, but with a gay smile:

"We will go in and dine with the good fathers. They are somewhat famous for their cheer, and it must be about the dinner hour."

The little crowd of attendants had followed

slowly behind their princely master, leaving a distance between him and them of a few paces for reverence sake; and he now beckoned up Lomelini, and told him to go forward, and let the household dine, adding:

"*We* will dine at the Abbey."

"How many shall remain with your Highness?" asked Lomelini, with a profound bow.

"None, Signor," replied the Duke. "None but Monsieur de Brecy. Go on—I would be incognito." Then, turning up the path, he struck the bell at the gates, with the iron hammer that hung beside it. "Now, de Brecy," he said, in a light and careless tone, very different from any his young companion had ever heard him use before; "here we forget our names and dignities. I am Louis Valois, and you Jean Charost, and there are no titles of honour between us. Some of the good friars may have seen me, and perhaps know me; but they will take the hint, and forget all about me till I am gone. I would fain see them without their

frocks for a while. It will serve to divert my thoughts from sad things."

With a slow and faltering step, and, as he came, mumbling something, apparently not very pleasant, an old monk walked down to the *grille*, or iron gate of the convent, with the keys in his hand indeed, but an evident determination not to use them, except in case of necessity. Seeing two strangers standing at the gate, he first spoke with them through the bars, and it required some persuasion to induce him to open, and let them pass, although, to say sooth, the Duke's announcement that he came to ask the hospitality of the refectory, was spoken more as a command than a petition, notwithstanding the air of easy familiarity which he sought to give it.

"Well, well, come in," said the Monk, at length. "I have nothing to do with it, but to open and shut the door. The people within will tell you whether you can eat with them, or not. They eat enough themselves, God wot, and drink

enough too; but they are not over fond of sharing with those they don't know, except through the buttery hole, or the east wicket; and there they dispense only what they can't eat themselves. Ah, we had different times of it when Abbot Jerome was alive."

Before this long fit of grumbling was at an end, the Duke of Orleans and his young companion were at the inner door of the building; and a little bell, ringing from a distant corner, gave notice that the mid-day meal of the monks was about to begin.

"Come along—come along, Jean," said the Duke, seeming to participate in the eagerness with which several monks were hurrying along in one direction. "They say the end of a feast is better than the beginning of a fray; but, to say truth, the beginning is the best part of either."

On they went; no one stopped them, no one said a word to them. The impulse of a very voracious appetite was upon the great body of

the monks, and deprived them of all inclination to question the strangers, till they were actually at the door of the refectory, where a burly, bare-footed fellow barred the way, and demanded what they wanted.

"A dinner," answered the Duke of Orleans, with a laugh. "You are hospitable friars, are you not?"

The man gazed at him for a moment, without reply; but, with a very curious expression of countenance, ran his eye over the Duke's apparel, which, though by no means splendid, was marked by all the peculiar fopperies of high station; he then gave a glance at Jean Charost, and replied, in a much altered tone:

"We are, sir. But it so happens that, to-day, my Lord Abbot has visitors who dine here. Doubtless he will not refuse you hospitality, is you let him know who it is demands it. He has with him Monsieur and Madame de Giac,

and their train, high persons at the Court of Burgundy. Who shall I say are here?"

"Two poor simple gentlemen in need of a dinner," replied the Duke, in a careless tone —"Louis Valois, and Jean Charost by name. But make haste, good brother, or the pottage will be cold."

The man retired into the refectory, the door of which was continually opening and shutting as the monks passed in; and Jean Charost, who stood a little to the right of the Duke, could see the monk hurry forward towards a gay party already seated at the head of one of the long tables, with the Abbot in the midst.

He returned in a few seconds with another monk, and ushered the Duke and his young companion straight up to the table of the Abbot, an elderly man of jovial aspect, who seemed a little confused and embarrassed. He rose, sat down again, rose once more, and advanced a step or two.

The Duke of Orleans met him half way with a meaning smile; and a few words passed in a low tone, the import of which Jean Charost did not hear. The Duke, however, immediately after, moved to a vacant seat some way down the table, and beckoned Jean Charost to take a place beside him. The young secretary obeyed, and had a full opportunity, before a rather long grace was ended, of scanning the faces of the guests who sat above him.

On the Abbot's right hand was placed a gentleman of about forty years of age, gaily dressed, but with a countenance by no means prepossessing—cold, calculating, yet harsh; and next to him was placed a young girl of thirteen or fourteen years of age, not at that time particularly remarkable for beauty, yet with an expression of countenance which, once seen, was not easily to be forgotten. That expression is difficult to be described; but it possessed a character which, as far as we can judge from very poor, and not very certain, portraits, was much

wanting in the countenances of most French women of the day. There was soul in it—a look blending thought and feeling—with much firmness and even decision about the small beautiful mouth, but a world of soft tenderness in the eyes.

On the other hand of the Abbot sat a gay and beautiful lady in the early prime of life, with her face beaming with witching smiles; and Jean Charost could not help thinking he saw a very meaning glance pass between the Duke of Orleans and herself. No one at the table, indeed, openly recognized the prince; and, although the young secretary had little doubt that his Royal master was known to several there present, it was clear that the great body of the monks were ignorant that his Highness was amongst them.

The fare upon the table did not by any means belie the reputation of the convent. Delicate meats well cooked, fish in abundance, and of various kinds, game of every sort the

country produced, and wine of exceedingly delicate flavour, showed how completely field, forest, tank, and vineyard, were laid under tribute by the good friars of Juvisy. Nor did the monks seem to mortify their tongues more than the rest of their bodies. Merriment, revelry, sometimes wit, sometimes buffonery, nay even conversation, often profane, and often very gross, ran along the table without any show of reverence for ears that might be listening.

The young man had been told of such things, but hardly believed them; and not a little scandalized was he in his simplicity at all he saw and heard. That which confounded him more than all the rest, however, was the demeanour of the Duke of Orleans. He did not know how often painful feelings and sensations take refuge in things the most opposite to themselves—how grief will labour to drown itself in the flood of revelry—how men strive to sweeten the cup of pain with the wild honey-drops of pleasure. From the first moment of his intro-

duction to the Duke up to that hour, Jean Charost had seen him under only one aspect. He had been grave, sad, thoughtful, gloomy. Health itself had seemed affected by some secret sorrow; and now everything was changed in a moment. He mingled gaily, lightly, in the conversation; gave back jest for jest with flashing repartee; encouraged and shared in the revelry around him; and drank liberally, although there was a glowing spot in his cheek, which seemed to say a fire was within, which wanted no such feeding.

The characters around would bear a long description; for monastic life, begun generally when habits of thought were fixed, had not the power ascribed by a great orator to education, of dissolving the original characters of men, and re-crystallizing them in a different form. At one part of the table was the rude, broad jester, rolling his fat body within his wide gown, and laughing riotously at his own jokes. At a little distance sat the keen, bright

satirist, full of flashes of wit and sarcasm, but as fond of earthly pleasures as all the rest; and a little nearer was the man of sly, quiet humour, as grave as a judge himself, but causing all around him to roar with laughter. The Abbot, overflowing with the good things of this life, and enjoying them still with undiminished powers, notwithstanding the sixty years and more which had passed over his head, was evidently well accustomed to the irreverent demeanour of his refectory, and probably might not have relished his dinner without the zest of its jokes. Certain it is, at all events, that, though his own parlor was a more comfortable room, and universal customs justified his dining in solitude, he was seldom absent at the hour of dinner, and only abstained from being present at supper likewise, lest he should hear and see more than could be well passed over in safety.

When the meal was at an end, however, the Abbot rose, and, inviting his lay guests to his

own particular apartments, left his monks to conduct the exercises of the afternoon as they might think fit. With his cross-bearer before him, he led the way, followed by the rest in the order which the narrowness of the passages compelled them to take; and Jean Charost found himself coupled, for the time, with the young girl he had seen on the opposite side of the table. He was too much of a Frenchman to hesitate for a moment in addressing her; for, in that country, silence in a woman's society is generally supposed to proceed either from awkwardness or rudeness. She answered with as little constraint; and they were in the full flow of conversation, when they entered a well-tapestried room, which, though large in itself, seemed small after the great hall of the refectory.

The Abbot, and the nobleman who had sat by his side, in whom Jean Charost recognized the Monsieur de Giac whom he had seen by torch-light in the streets of Paris, were already talk-

ing to each other with some eagerness, while the Duke of Orleans followed a step or two behind, conversing in low tones with the beautiful lady who had sat at the Abbot's other hand.

Gay and light seemed their conference; and both laughed, and both smiled, and both whispered, though apparently not from any reverence for the persons or place around them. But no one took any notice. Monsieur de Giac was very blind to his wife's coquetry; and the Abbot was well accustomed to the feat of shutting his eyes without dropping his eyelids. Nay, he seemed to think the merriment hardly sufficient for the occasion; for he ordered more wines to be brought, and those the most choice and delicate of his cellar, with various preserved fruits, gently to stimulate the throat to deeper potations.

"Not very reverend," said Jean Charost, in answer to some observation of the young lady, shortly after they entered, while the rest re-

mained scattered about in different groups. "I wonder if every monastery throughout France is like this."

"Very like indeed," answered his fair companion, with a smile. "Surely this is not the first religious house you have ever visited."

"The first of its kind," replied Jean Charost. "I have been often in the Black-friars at Bourges; but their rule is somewhat more austere, or more austerely practised."

"Poor people!" exclaimed the girl. "It is to be hoped there is a Heaven, for their sakes. These good folks seem to think themselves well enough where they are, without going farther. But, in sorry truth, all monasteries are very much like this—those that I have seen, at least."

"And nunneries?" asked Jean Charost.

"A little better," she answered, with a sigh. "Whatever faults women may have, they are not such coarse faults as we have seen here to-night. But I know not much about

them; for I have been only long enough in one to judge of it rightly; and now I feel like a bird with its prison doors unclosed, because I am going to join the court of the Queen of Anjou. That does not speak ill of the nunnery, methinks. Who knows, if they revelled as loud and high there as here, but I might have loved to remain?"

"I think not," returned her young companion, "if I may judge by your face at dinner. You seemed not to smile on the revels of the monks."

"They made my head ache," answered the girl; and then added, abruptly—"So you are an observer of faces, are you? What think you of that face speaking with the Abbot?"

"Nay, he may be your father, brother, or any near relation," said Jean Charost. "I shall not speak till I know more."

"Oh, he is nothing to me," replied the girl. "He is my noble Lord of Giac, who does me the great honor, with my lady, his wife, of

conveying me to Beaugency, where we shall overtake the Queen of Anjou. His face would not curdle milk, or turn wine sour; but yet there is something in it not of honey, exactly."

"He seems to leave all the honey to his fair lady," observed Jean Charost.

"Yes, to catch flies with," retorted the girl; and then added, in a low tone, "and he is the spider to eat them."

The wine and the preserved fruits had, by this time, been placed upon a large marble table in the centre of the hall; and a fair sight they made, with the silver flagons, and the gold and jewelled cups, spread out upon that white expanse, beneath the grey and fretted arches overhead, and the several groups around, in their bright apparel, and the Abbot in his robes, standing by the table, with a serving-brother by his side, on whom the many-coloured lights shone strongly through the window of painted glass.

"Here's to you, noble sir, whom I am to

call Louis Valois, and to your young friend, Jean Charost," said the Abbot, bowing to the Duke, and raising a cup he had just filled. "I pray you do me justice in this excellent wine of Nuits."

"I will but sip, my Lord," replied the Duke, taking a cup. "I have drunk enough already, somewhat to heat me."

"Nay, nay, good gentleman," cried the fai lady with whom he had been talking. "Let me fill for you! Drink fairly with the Lord Abbot, for very shame; or I will tell the Duke of Orleans, who passes here, they say, to-day."

The last words were uttered with a meaning smile; but the Duke let her pour the wine out for him, drank it, and then, with a graceful inclination to the company, took a step towards the door, saying,

"The Duke of Orleans has gone by, madam; at least, his train passed us while we were at the gates. My Lord Abbot, I give you a

thousand thanks for your hospitality. Ladies all, farewell!" In passing Madame de Giac, he added, in a whisper, which reached, however, the ears of Jean Charost, who was following, "In Paris, then."

The lady made no answer with her lips; but her eyes spoke sufficiently, and, to the thoughts of Jean Charost, rather too much so.

The serving-brother opened the door of the parlour for the guests to pass out; and he had not yet closed it, when the name of the Duke of Orleans was repeated from more than one voice within, and a merry peal of laughter followed.

The Duke hastened his steps, holding the arm of his young companion; and though the smile lingered on his lips for a while, yet, before they reached the gate of the convent, it had passed away. Gradually he fell into a fit of deep thought, which lasted till they had nearly descended to Juvisy. Then, however,

he roused himself, and said, with an abrupt laugh,

"I sometimes think men of pleasure are mad, de Brecy."

"I think so too, your Highness," replied Jean Charost.

The Duke started, and looked suddenly in his face; but all was calm and simple there: and, after a moment's silence, the prince rejoined,

"Too true, my young friend, too true! A lucid interval often comes upon them, full of high purposes and good resolves: they see light; and truth, and reality, for a few short hours, when, suddenly, some accident—some trifle—brings the fit again, and all is darkness and delusion, delirious dreams, and actions of a mad-man. I have heard of a bridge built of broken porcelain—and such is the life of a man of pleasure. The bridge over which his course lies, from time to eternity, is built of broken resolutions, and himself the architect."

"A frail structure, my Lord, by which to reach Heaven," replied Jean Charost; "and methinks some strong beams across would make us surer of reaching even happiness."

"Where can one find them?" asked the Duke.

"In a strong will," answered Jean Charost.

The Duke mused for a moment or two, and then suddenly changed the conversation, saying,

"Who was the girl you were speaking with?"

"In truth, your Highness, I do not know," replied Jean Charost. "She said that she was going under the escort of Monsieur and Madame de Giac to Beaugency."

"Oh! then I know," returned the Duke. "It is the fair Agnes, whom my good aunt talked about. They say she has a wit quite beyond her years. Did you find it so?"

"I cannot tell," replied Jean Charost; "for I do not know her age. She seemed to me

quite a girl, and yet spoke like one who thought much and deeply."

"You were well matched," said the Duke, gaily.

At this moment, some of his attendants came up, and the conversation stopped for the time.

CHAPTER XII.

THE twilight of a fine winter's evening filled the air, as the train of the Duke of Orleans approached his chateau of Beauté. Standing upon a high bank, with the river flowing in sight, and catching the last rosy rays which still lingered in the sky, though the sun was set, the house presented a grand, rather than a graceful, appearance, though it was from the combination of beautiful forms and rich decoration, with the defensive strength absolutely requisite in all country mansions at that day,

that it derived its name of Beauté. The litter had been repaired at Juvisy, and the Duke of Orleans had taken possession of it again; but, as the cavalcade wound up the ascent towards the castle, the Prince put his head out, and ordered one of the nearest attendants to call Lomelini to him.

"I am ill, Lomelini," he said, as soon as the Maitre d'Hotel rode up. "I am ill. Go forward, and see that my bed-chamber is prepared."

"Had I not better send back for your Highness's chirurgeon?" asked Lomelini. "'Tis a pity he was left behind in Paris."

"No, no," replied the Prince. "Let him stay where he is. He overwhelms me with his talk of phlebotomy and humours, his calculations of the moon, and his caption of fortunate hours. 'Tis but a little sickness that will pass. —Besides, there is the man at Corbeil. He can let blood, or compound a cooling potion."

As soon as the cavalcade had entered the

court-yard of the chateau, the Duke was assisted from his litter, and retired at once to his chamber, leaning upon the arm of Lomelini, who was all attention and humble devotion. The rest of the party were scattered in different directions, most of those present knowing well where to betake themselves, and each seeking the dwelling-place to which he was accustomed.

Jean Charost, however, had no notion where he was to lodge; and now, for the first time, came into play the abilities of his new servant, Martin Grille. His horses were stabled in a minute, whether in the right place or not Martin stopped not to inquire; and, the moment that was done, divining well the embarrassment of an inexperienced master, the good man darted hither and thither, acquiring very rapidly from the different varlets and pages a vast amount of information regarding the chateau and its customs.

He found Jean Charost walking up and down

a large hall which opened directly, without any vestibule, from the principal door of entrance. The secretary was plunged so deeply in meditation, that he seemed to see none of the persons who were passing busily to and fro around him. His reverie was deep, and something more: it was not altogether pleasant. Who, in the cares and anxieties of mature life, does not sometimes pause and look back wistfully to to the calmer days of childhood, decking them with fanciful memories of joys and sports, and burying in forgetfulness the troubles and sorrows which seemed severe at the time? The two spirits that are in man, indeed, never exercise their influence more strongly in opposition than in prompting the desire for peace, and the eagerness for action.

Jean Charost was busy at the moment with the unprofitable, fruitless comparison of the condition in which he had lately lived, and his present station. The calm and tranquil routine of ordinary business, the daily occupation,

somewhat monotonous, but without anxiety or even expectation, the peaceful hours for study, for thought, or for exercise, when not engaged in the service of no very exacting master, acquired a new and extraordinary interest in his eyes now that ambition was gratified, and he appeared in the road to honour and success. It was not that he was tired of the Duke of Orleans' service: it was not that he misappreciated the favours he received, or the kindness with which he had been treated. But the look back, or the look forward, makes a great difference in our estimate of events and circumstances; and he felt that full appreciation of the past which nothing that is not past can altogether command. Yet, if he strove to fix upon any point in regard to which he had been disappointed, he found it difficult to do so. But there was something in the whole which created in his breast a general feeling of depression. There was a sensation of anxiety, and doubt, and suspicion, in regard to all that

surrounded him. A dim sort of mist of uncertainty hung over the whole, which to his daylight loving mind was very painful. One half of what he saw or heard, he did not comprehend. Men seemed to be speaking in a strange, unlearned language—to be acting a mystery, the secret of which would not be developed till near the end.

He was pondering over all these things, and asking himself how he should act in the midst of them, when Martin Grille approached, and in a low tone told him all that he had discovered, offering to show him where the secretary's apartments were situated.

"But can I be sure that the same rooms are destined for me?" asked Jean Charost.

"Take them, sir, take them," answered Martin Grille; "that is to say, if they are good, and suit you. The only quality that is not valued at a court, is modesty. It is always better to seize what you can get; and the difficulty of dispossessing you, nine times out of

ten, makes men leave you what you have taken. Signor Lomelini is still with the Duke; so that you cannot ask *him* any questions. You must be lodged somewhere; so you had better lodge yourself."

Jean Charost thought the advice was good, especially as night had, by this time, fallen, and a single cresset in the hall afforded the only light, except when some one passed by with a lamp in his hand. He followed Martin Grille, therefore, and was just issuing forth, when Juvenel de Royans, and another young man of the same age, came in by the very door out of which he was going.

At the sight of the young secretary, de Royans drew back with a look of affected reverence, made a low inclination of the head, and then burst into a loud laugh. Jean Charost gazed at him with a cold, unmoved look, expressive, perhaps, of surprise, but nothing else, and then passed on his way.

"Those gentlemen will bring themselves into

trouble before they have done," said Martin Grille. "That Monsieur de Royans is already deep in the bad books."

"No deeper than he deserves," answered Jean Charost; "but, perhaps, they may find they have made a mistake before they have done."

"Ah, good sir, never quarrel with a courtier," said the servant. "They are like wary fencers, and try to put a man in a passion in order to throw him off his guard. But here are your rooms at the end of this passage. That door is the back entrance to the Duke's apartments; the front is on the other corridor."

With some lingering still of doubt, Jean Charost took possession of the rooms, which he found more convenient than those he had inhabited in Paris; and, by the aid of Martin Grille, all was quickly put in order.

The hour of supper soon arrived, when, descending to the general table of the house-

hold, he found a place reserved for him by Monsieur Blaize, but a good deal of strange coldness in the manners of all around. Even the old *ecuyer* himself was somewhat distant and reserved; and it was not till long afterwards that Jean Charost discovered how much malice any marks of favor from a Prince can excite, and to how much falsehood such malice may give birth. His attempt to stop the horses of the litter had been severely commented on as an act of impertinent forwardness by all those who ought to have done it themselves; and they and every one else agreed, notwithstanding the Duke's own words, that the attempt had only served to throw one of the horses down.

The only one who seemed cordial at the table, was the good priest, Father Peter; but the chaplain could afford very little of his conversation to his young friend, being himself, during the whole meal, the butt of the jester's wit, to which he could not refrain from reply-

ing, although, to say sooth, he got worsted in the encounter. All were tired, however; and all soon withdrew to rest, with the exception of Jean Charost, who sat up in his bed-room for two or three hours, laying out for himself, a course of conduct, which would save him, as far as possible, from all minor annoyances. Nor was that course altogether ill devised, for the attainment of even higher objects than he proposed.

"I will live in this household," he thought, "as far as possible by myself. I will seek my own amusements apart, if I can but discover at what time the Duke is likely to want me. Any who wish for my company shall seek it; and I will keep all familiarity at a distance. I will endeavour to avoid all quarrels with them; but if I am forced into one, I will try to make my opponent rue it."

At an early hour on the following morning, the young man went forth to enquire after the Duke's health, and learned, from one of the

attendants at the door, that he had passed a bad and feverish night.

"I was bidden to tell you, sir," said the man, "if you presented yourself, that his Highness would like to see you at three this evening; but will not want you till then."

This intimation was a relief to Jean Charost; and, returning to his room, where he had left Martin Grille, he told him to prepare both their horses for a long ride.

"Before breakfast, sir?" asked the man.

"Yes, immediately," replied the young secretary. "We will breakfast somewhere, Martin, and dine somewhere too; but I wish to explore the country, which seemed beautiful enough as we rode along."

"Monstrous white, sir," returned Martin Grille. "However, you had better take some arms with you; for we may chance to miss the high-roads, I being in no way topographical; and the country in this neighbourhood does not bear the best reputation."

Jean Charost merely laughed at his fears; and, before half an hour was over, they were on their horses' backs, and away.

The morning was bright and pleasant, notwithstanding the keen frostiness of the air. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees, and the sun was shining cheerfully, though its rays had no effect upon the snow. There was a silence, too, over the whole scene as soon as the immediate vicinity of the castle was passed, which was pleasant to Jean Charost's feelings, cooped up as he had been for several months in the close atmosphere of a town. From a slow walk he urged his horse into a trot, from a trot into a canter; and when at length the wood which mantled the castle was passed, and the road opened out upon the rounded side of the hill, boyhood's fountain of light spirits seemed re-opened in his heart, and he spurred his horse into a wild gallop over the nearly level ground at the top.

Martin Grille came panting after. He was not one of the best horsemen in the world; and, though he clung pretty fast to his steed's back, he was awfully shaken. That gay gallop, however, had a very powerful effect upon the good varlet. Bad horsemen have always a great reverence for good ones. Martin Grille's esteem for his master's talents had been but small before, simply because his own worldly experience, his intimate knowledge of all tricks and contrivances, and the facile impudence and fertility of resources which he possessed as the hereditary right of a Parisian of the lower orders, had enabled him to direct and counsel in a thousand trifles which had embarrassed his master, merely from his being unaccustomed to deal with them. But now, when he saw his easy mastery of the strong horse, the light rein, the graceful seat, the joyous hilarity of aspect with which the young man bounded along, while he himself was clinging

tightly to the saddle, with a fearful pressure, he felt an inferiority which he had never acknowledged to himself before.

At length, Jean Charost stopped, looked round and smiled, and Martin Grille, riding up, exclaimed, in a half dolorous, half laughing, tone:

"Spare, sir, I beseech you, spare! You forget I am not accustomed to such wild capers. Every man is awkward, I find, in a new situation; and though I can get on pretty well at procession pace, if my horse neither kicks nor stumbles, I would rather be excused galloping over hill-sides, for a fortnight at least, till *my* leather and *his* leather are better acquainted."

"Well, well," answered his master, "we will go a little more slowly, though we must have a canter now and then, if but to make the snow fly. We will ride on straight for that village where the church tower is peeping up, on the opposite side of the hill."

"There is a thick, low wood between us and it," said Martin Grille.

"Doubtless the wood has a road through it," answered his master. And without farther discussion he rode on.

The wood, or rather forest—for it was a limb of the great forest of Corbeil—of which Martin Grille spoke, lay in the hollow between two gentle ranges of hills, upon one of which he and his master were placed at the moment. It was deeper, more extensive, and more intricate, than Jean Charost, seeing across from slope to slope, but not high enough up to look down upon it as a map, at all supposed. As he directed his horse towards it, however, he soon came upon a road marked out by the track of horses, oxen, and carts, showing that many a person and many a vehicle had passed along it since the snow had fallen; and, even had he clearly comprehended that his servant entertained any apprehensions, he would only have laughed at them.

On entering the wood, the snow upon the ground, shining through the bare stems of the trees and the thin brown branches of the underwood, at first showed every object on either hand for several yards into the thicket. Even the foot-prints of the hare and the roe-deer could be seen; and Jean Charost, well accustomed to forest-sports in his boyhood, paused at one spot where the bushes were a good deal beaten down, to point out the marks to his servant, and say:

"A boar has been through there."

Some way further on, the wood became thicker; oaks, and rapidly deciduous trees, gave way to the long-persistent beech; and beneath the tall patriarchs of the forest, which had been suffered to grow up almost beyond maturity, a young undergrowth, reserved for fire-wood, and cut every thirteen or fourteen years, formed a screen into which the eye could not penetrate more than a very few feet. Every here and there, too, were stunted ever-

greens, thickening the copse, and bearing upon their sturdy, though dwarfish, arms, many a large mass of snow which they had caught in its descent towards the ground. Across the road, in one place, was a solid mass of ice, which, a few weeks before, had been running in a gay rivulet; and not twenty yards farther, was a little stream of beautiful limpid water, without a trace of congelation, except a narrow fringe of ice on either bank.

Here Jean Charost pulled up his horse; and then, slackening the rein, let the beast put down his head to drink. Martin Grille did so likewise; but, a moment after, both heard a sound of voices speaking at some little distance on the left.

"Hark, hark!" whispered Martin Grille. "There are people in the wood—in the very heart of the wood."

"Why, where would you find woodmen but in the wood?" asked Jean Charost. "You will hear their axes presently."

"I hope we shan't feel them," observed Martin Grille, in the same low tone. "I declare that the only fine wood scenery I ever saw has been at the back of the fire."

"They have got a fire there," said Jean Charost, pointing onward, but a little to the left. "Don't you see the blue smoke curling up through the trees into the clear air?"

"I do indeed, sir," replied Martin Grille, "pray, sir, let us turn back. It's not half so pretty as a smoky chimney."

"Are you a coward?" asked Jean Charost, turning somewhat sharply upon him.

"Yes, sir," replied Martin, meekly, "a desperate one—I have an uncle who fights for all the family."

"Then stay where you are, or go back if you like," said his master. "I shall go on and see who these folks are. You had better go back, if you are afraid."

"Yes, sir—no, sir," replied Martin Grille. "I *am* afraid—very much afraid—but I won't

go back. I'll stay by you if I have my brains knocked out—though, good faith, they're not much worth knocking just now; for they feel quite addled—curd—curd; and a little whey, too, I have a notion. But go on, sir—go on. They are not worth keeping, if they are not worth losing."

Jean Charost rode on, with a smile, pitying the man's fears, but believing them to be perfectly idle and foolish. The district of Berry, his native place, had hitherto escaped in a great degree the calamities which for years had afflicted the neighbourhood of Paris. There was too little to be got there, for the plundering bands which had sprung up from the dragon's teeth sown by the wars of Edward the Third of England, and Philip and John of France, or those which had arisen from the contentions between the Orleans and Burgundian parties, to infest the neighbourhood of Bourges; and while the Parisian servant, with his mind full of tales, brought daily into the capital, of atrocities per-

petrated in its immediate vicinity, fancied every bush, not an officer, but a thief, his young master could hardly bring himself to imagine that there was such a thing as danger in riding through a little wood, within less than half a league of the chateau of the Duke of Orleans.

He rode on, then, in full confidence about fifty or sixty yards farther; but then suddenly stopped and raised his hand as a sign for his servant to stop likewise. Martin Grille almost jumped out of the saddle on his master's sudden halt, and drew so deep a snorting sort of sigh, that Jean Charost whispered, with an impatient gesture—

"Hush!"

The fact was, his ears had caught, as they rode on, a sound, coming from the direction where rose the smoke, which did not altogether satisfy him. It was an exceedingly blasphemous oath, which, in those days, was common enough in the mouths of military men, and

not always a stranger to the lips of kings; but by no means likely to be uttered by a plain peasant or honest wood-cutter.

He listened again; more words of similar import were uttered. It was evident that the approach of horses over the snow had not been heard, and that, whoever were the persons in the wood, they were conversing together very freely, and in no very choice language.

Curiosity seized upon Jean Charost, who was by no means without his faults; and, quietly swinging himself from his horse's back, he gave the rein to Martin Grille, saying in a whisper,

"Here, hold my horse; I want to ascertain what these people are about. If you see danger—and you have put the fancy into *my* head, too—you may either bring him up to me, or ride away as fast as you can to the Chateau of Beauté, and tell what has happened."

"I will do both, sir," said Martin Grille, with his head a good deal confused by

fear. "That is to say, I will first bring him up to you, and then ride away. But I do see danger now. Hadn't you better get up again?"

Jean Charost walked on, with a laugh; but, after going some ten or fifteen paces, he slackened his speed, and with a light step turned in amongst the bushes where there was a little sort of brake between two enormous old beech trees. Martin Grille watched him as he advanced, and kept sight of him for some moments, as, quietly and slowly, he took his way forward in the direction of the smoke which was still very plainly to be seen from the spot where the varlet sat.

It is not to be denied that Martin's heart beat very fast and very unpleasantly, as much for his master as for himself, perhaps; and certainly, as the dry twigs and bramble-stalks made a thicker and a thicker sort of mist round Jean Charost's receding figure, the good man

gave him up for lost, and felt that he had conceived a greater affection for him than he had before imagined. He felt a strong inclination, notwithstanding his fears, to get a little nearer, and was debating with himself whether he should do so or not, when all doubt and hesitation was put to an end by a loud shout, and a fierce volley of oaths, from the wood.

Nature would have her way: Martin Grille turned sharp round, struck his spurs into the horse's sides, and never stopped till he got to the gates of the Chateau.

A party of armed men was instantly collected on his report. Good Monsieur Blaize put himself at their head, without waiting to seek casque or corslet; and, compelling Martin Grille, very unwillingly, to go with them, they hurried on in the direction he pointed out over the hill, and down towards the verge of the wood. They had not reached it, however, when, to the surprise of all, they beheld Joan Charost walking

quietly towards them, bearing something in his arms; and on approaching nearer they perceived, with greater astonishment than ever, that his burden was a young child wrapped in somewhat costly swaddling-clothes.

CHAPTER XIII.

MANY, eager, and loud, were the inquiries of the party who came to the rescue of Jean Charost, regarding his adventures since Martin had left him; but their curiosity was left unsatisfied. All he thought fit to tell, amounted merely to the facts that he had been surrounded and seized, before he was prepared to resist, by a party which seemed to him to consist of common robbers; that for some time his life had seemed in danger; and that, in the end, his captors, after having emptied his purse,

had consented to let him go, on condition that he would carry away the child with him, and promise to take care of it for six years. He had been made to take an oath also, he stated, neither to pursue the party who had captured him, nor to give any description of their persons; and, notwithstanding the arguments of the Duke's retainers, and especially of Monsieur Blaize, who sought to persuade him that an oath taken in duresse was of no avail, he resolutely kept his word.

The old *ecuyer* seemed mortified and displeased; but he did not hesitate long as to his own course; and, leaving the young secretary and Martin Grille to find their way back to the Chateau of Beauté as they might, he dashed on into the wood with his companions, swearing that he would bring in the marauders or know the reason why.

He was disappointed, however. The place where the captors of Jean Charost had been enjoying themselves was easily found by the

embers of the fire round which they had sat; but they themselves were gone, leaving nothing but an empty leathern bottle and some broken meat behind them. The tracks of their horses' feet, too, could be traced for some distance; but, after they entered the little road through the wood, these became indistinct amidst other foot-prints and ruts; and, although Monsieur Blaize and his companions followed them, as they thought, to the village beyond, they could obtain no information from the peasantry. No man would admit that he had seen any one pass but Mathew So-and-so, the farmer, or the priest of the parish on his mule, or the baillie on his horse, or some labourers with waggons; and, after a two hours' search, the party of the Duke's men returned to the Castle, surly and disappointed, and resolved to spare no means of drawing all the particulars from Jean Charost.

In the meantime, the young secretary had returned to the little hamlet which had gathered round the foot of the Chateau of Beauté,

making Martin Grille, who was rather ashamed of the part which he had acted in the morning's adventures, carry the infant in his arms; a task for which he was better fitted than Jean Charost himself; for, to say truth, he made no bad nurse, and one of his many good qualities was a great love for children.

At the hamlet, Jean Charost paused, and went into one or two of the cottages, enquiring for Angeline Moulinet; but he had to go down quite to the foot of the hill before he found the house of the person of whom he was in search. It was small, but much neater than most of the rest; and, on opening the door, he found a little scene of domestic happiness which pleased the eye. A young husband and wife, apparently tolerably well to do in the world, were seated together with two young children, the husband busily engaged in carving out a pair of *sabots*, or wooden shoes, from an old stump of willow, and the wife spinning as fast as she could get her fingers to go. The boy was, of course,

teasing a cat; the little girl, still younger, was crawling about upon her hands and knees, and rolling before her a great wooden ball, probably of her father's handiwork. The fire burned brightly; everything about the place was clean and comfortable; and the whole formed a pleasant scene of calm mediocrity and rural happiness, better than all the Arcadias that ever were dreamt of.

The wife rose up when her well-dressed visitor entered, and the husband inclined his head without leaving off his operations upon the *sabot*. But both looked a little surprised when Martin Grille followed his master into the cottage, carrying an infant in his arms; and Angeline Moulinet, with the kindly tact which never abandons a woman, put down her distaff, and went to look at the baby, comprehending at once that some strange accident had brought it there, and willing to smooth the way for explanation.

"What a beautiful little girl!" she ex-

claimed. "Come, Pierrot! look, what a beautiful child!"

"Is it a little girl?" said Jean Charost, in perfect simplicity. "I am sure I did not know it."

"Lord bless me, sir!" cried the good woman. "Don't you see?"

"All I see," replied Jean Charost, "is, that it is an infant which has accidentally been cast upon my hands; and I wish to know, Madame Moulinet, if you will take care of it for me."

The young woman looked at her husband, and the husband gazed with some astonishment at Jean Charost, murmuring, at length, though with evident deference to his better half—

"I think we have enough of our own."

"I do not expect you to take charge of this child," said Jean Charost, "without proper payment. I will engage that you shall be well rewarded for your pains."

"But, sir, we do not know you," said the man.

His wife, in the same breath, enquired—

"Pray, sir, who sent you to us?"

Jean Charost hesitated; and then, taking the child from Martin Grille, told him to leave the cottage for a moment.

The valet obeyed; but, being blessed with the faculty of other valets, he took up a position on the outside of the house which he fancied would enable him to use both his hearing and his sight. Neither served him much, however; for, though he saw good Angeline Moulinet take the child from Jean Charost's arms, who bent down his head towards herself and her husband as they stood together, as if saying a few words to them in a low tone, not one of those words reached his ear through the cottage window. He could make nothing, either, of the gestures of any of the party. Angeline raised her eyes towards the sky, as if

in some surprise; and Pierrot crossed his arms upon his chest, looking grave and thoughtful. The moment after, both were seen to speak quickly together; and the result of the consultation, if it were one, was made manifest by Jean Charost leaving the child with them, and coming out of the cottage door.

"Now, give me my horse," said Jean; and then added, while Martin unfastened the bridle from the iron ring—"Remember this house, Martin. You will have to bring some money here to-night."

"I will not forget it, sir," replied Martin Grille; and then added, with a laugh—"And I will bring the money safely, which is more than many a varlet could say of himself."

But before the last words were uttered, his young master was in the saddle, and on his way towards the Chateau.

Under a sharp, pointed arch, which formed the gate-way, two or three of the Duke's men were lounging about; and the moment Jean

Charost appeared, one of them advanced to his horse's side, saying—

"His Highness has been enquiring for you, sir."

"Is it three of the clock yet?" asked Jean Charost, somewhat anxiously.

"Not two yet, sir," replied the man.

Springing from his horse, the young secretary hurried on towards the apartments of the Duke. He was admitted instantly, and found his princely master seated in a chair, dressed in a light, furred dressing-gown, and sadly changed in appearance, even since the preceding day. His face was very pale, his eye heavy, and his lips parched; but still he smiled with a good humored, though not gay, expression of countenance, saying—

"I hope they have not recalled you from any amusement, de Brecy; for I did not think I should want you till three. But I feel ill, my friend, and very busy thoughts are in my mind."

He paused for a moment or two, looking down thoughtfully on the table, and then added, slowly—

"When the brain is full, perhaps the heart is too. Of these eager, active, tireless assailants, called thoughts, we are glad to drive some forth. Alas, de Brecy, how rarely does a prince find any one to share them with!"

He paused again; and Jean Charost did not venture a reply. He would fain have said—"Share them with me." But he felt that it would be presumptuous, and he remained silent.

"You, de Brecy," resumed the Duke, "are different from the rest of the people about me; from any one I have ever had—unhackneyed in the world—not ground down to nothing by the polishing of a court. There is something new and fresh about you, like what I once was myself. *Now*, what am I? By starts a wise man, by starts a fool."

"Oh no, my Prince!" cried Jean Charost, "I cannot believe that. 'Tis but temptation leads you, for a moment, from the path of wisdom: the sickness, as it were, of an hour. But the life is healthy; the heart is sound."

The Prince smiled, but went on, apparently pursuing the course of his own thoughts.

"To know what is right—to do what is wrong," said he—"to feel a strong desire for good, and constantly to fall into evil—surely this is folly. Surely it is a life of folly. Surely it is worse than if one did not know what ought to be, as a blind man cannot be charged with stupidity for running against a wall which any other would be an idiot not to avoid."

He looked up in his secretary's face; and Jean Charost, encouraged by his tone, ventured to observe,

"It wants but a strong will, sir. You have a strong will against your enemies, I know. Why not have a strong will against yourself?"

"I have, de Brecy—I have," replied the Duke. "But my strong will against myself is just like my strong will against my enemies—very potent for the time, but easily mollified. A peace is proposed—favourable terms of compromise offered—and lo, I and myself are friends again, and all our mutual offences forgiven."

He spoke with a smile, for the figure amused his fancy; but the next instant he started up, saying:

"It is time that this should come to an end! My will is now powerful, and my future course shall be different. I will take my resolutions firmly—I will shape my course—I will lay it down in writing, as if on a map; and then very shame will prevent me from deviating. Sit down, de Brecy, sit down; and write what I shall dictate."

Jean Charost seated himself, took some paper which was upon the table, and dipped a pen in the ink, while the Duke stood by his side in

such a position that he could see the sheet under his hand, on which he gazed for a minute or two with a thoughtful, half absent look.

The young secretary expected him every moment to begin the dictation of the resolutions which he had formed; but, at length, the Duke said, in an altered tone:

"No need of that. It would show a doubt of myself, of which I trust there is none. No, no: true resolution needs not fetters. I have resolved enough: I will begin to act. Give me that fur cloak, de Brecy; and go and see if the picture gallery be warmed. Tell one of the varlets at the door to pile logs enough upon the fire, and to wait there. Then return to me."

Without reply, Jean Charost quitted the room, and told one of the two attendants, who were seated without, to show him the way to the picture-gallery—an apartment he had never yet heard of. The man led him on along the corridor, to a door at no great distance, which he opened; and Jean Charost, the moment after,

found himself in a long, narrow sort of hall, extending across the whole width of the building, and lighted from both ends. It was divided into three separate portions, by columns on either side; and the walls between were covered with pictures nearly to the top.

To our eyes these paintings might seem poor and crude; but to the eyes of Jean Charost they were, like those which he had seen at the Hotel d'Orleans, in Paris, perfect marvels of art. Before he paused to examine any of them, he ordered more wood to be thrown upon the fire, which was burning faintly in the great fire-place in the centre; and, while the attendant had gone to bring the wood from a locker, he walked slowly towards the western end of the gallery, where, upon a little strip of white silk, suspended between the two columns, appeared, in large letters, the word "AMORI." On entering that portion of the gallery, he was not at all surprised, after reading the inscription, to find that it contained nothing but portraits of

women. All seemed very beautiful; and, though the faces were strange to him, he recognised the names which, in most instances, were inscribed in large letterson the frames.

A general look around filled him with astonishment, and with a sort of consternation at the daring levity which had gathered together, under so meaning an inscription, the portraits of some of the most celebrated ladies in France. But he did not pause long; for the fire was soon arranged and kindled into a blaze; and he returned, as he had been directed, to the chamber of the Duke.

"Now," said the Prince, as he entered, "is all ready?"

"'Tis, sir," answered Jean Charost; "but the air is still chilly; and, in truth, your Highness does not look well. Were it not better to pause for a while?"

"No, no," replied the Duke of Orleans, quickly, but not sharply. "Let us go at once, my friend. I will put such a seal upon my re-

solutions, that neither I, nor the world, shall ever forget them."

He drew the fur cloak tighter around him, and walked out of the room, leaning heavily on the young secretary's arm. As he passed, he bade both the men at the chamber door follow; and then, walking into the galley, he turned directly to that portion of it which Jean Charost had examined. There, seating himself in a chair near the centre of the room, while the two servants stood at a little distance behind, he pointed to a picture in the extreme south western corner, and bade Jean Charost bring it to him. It was the picture of a girl, quite young, less beautiful than many of the others, indeed, but with the peculiar beauty of youth; and when the Duke of Orleans had got it, he let the edge of the frame rest upon his knee for a moment or two, and gazed upon the face in silence.

Jean Charost would have given a great deal to be able to see into the Duke's heart at that

moment, and to trace there the emotions to which the contemplation of that picture gave rise. A smile, tender and melancholy, rested upon the Prince's face; but the melancholy deepened into heavy gloom as he continued to gaze, and the smile rapidly departed.

"I might spare this one," he said. "Poor thing! I might spare this one. The grave has no jealousies."

He gazed again for a single instant, and then said—

"No, no—all all. Here, take it, and put it on the fire."

Turning his head, he had spoken to one of the attendants; but the man seemed so utterly confounded by the order, that he repeated the words, "On the fire?" as he received the picture from the Prince's hands.

"Yes! on the fire," said the Duke, slowly and sternly; and then, pointing to another, he added—

"Give me that."

Jean Charost brought it to him, when it met with the same fate, but with less consideration than the other. Another and another succeeded.

At length, a larger one than the rest was pointed out by the Duke; and the young secretary stopped for an instant before it, utterly confounded as he read beneath the name of the Duchess of Burgundy. It fared no better than the rest; and another still was added to the flames.

The Duke there paused, saying—

"I am ill, my friend—I am ill. I cannot go on with this. I leave the task to you. Stay here with these men, and see that every one of the pictures in this room, as far as yonder two columns on either side, be burned before nightfall, with one exception. I look to you to see the execution of an act which, if I die, will wipe out a sad stain from my memory. You hear what I say," he continued, turning to the two attendants; and was then walking towards

the centre door of the gallery, when Jean Charost observed—

"Your Highness mentioned one exception; but you did not point it out."

The Duke laid his hand upon his arm, led him to the side of the room, and pointed to a picture nearly in the centre, merely uttering the word—

"That!"

On the frame was inscribed the words—"Valentine, Duchess of Orleans."

After having gazed at it for a moment, in silence, the Prince turned and quitted the room.

When he was gone, Jean Charost remained for a few minutes without taking any step to obey his command. The two men stood likewise with their arms crossed in a reverie nearly as grave as that of the young secretary; but their thoughts were very different from his. He comprehended in a degree the motives upon which the Prince acted, and felt how strong

and vigorous must be the resolution, and yet how painful the feelings, which had prompted the order he had given. Nay more, his fancy shadowed forth a thousand accessories—a thousand associations which must have hung round, and connected themselves with that strong act of determination which his royal master had just performed—sweet memories, bitter feelings, young hopes, ardent passions, kindly sympathies, wayward caprices, volatile forgetfulness, sorrow, regret, and mourning and remorse.

A light, as from imagination, played round the portraits as he gazed upon them. The spirits of the dead, of the neglected, of the forgotten, seemed to animate the features on the wall; and he could not but feel a sort of painful regret that, however guilty, however vain, however foolish, might be the passion which caused those speaking effigies to be ranged around, he should have been selected to consign them to that destroying

element which must devour the picture, but could not obliterate the sin.

At length, he started from his rumination, and began the appointed work; the men obeying habitually the orders they received, although doubts existed in their mind whether the Prince was not suffering from temporary insanity in commanding the destruction of objects which they looked upon only as rare treasures without the slightest conception of the associations which so often in this world render those things, most estimable in the eyes of others, sad, painful, or perilous, to the possessor.

In about an hour, all was completed; and I am not certain that what I may call the experience of that hour, the thoughts, the sensations, the fancies, of Jean Charost had not added more than one year to his mental life. Certain it is, that, with a stronger and a more manly step, and with even additional earnestness of character, he walked back to the apart-

ments of the Duke, and knocked for admission. A voice, but not that of the Prince, told him, after a moment's delay, to come in; and he found the Maitre d'Hotel in conference with his master.

"Come in, de Brecy," said the Duke. "Leave us, Lomelini—you are his good friend, I know; but I have to speak with him on my own affairs, not on his. With them I have nothing, to do; and it were well for others not to meddle, either. So let them understand."

The Maitre d'Hotel retired, bowing low; and, after remaining a moment or two in thought, the Duke raised his eyes to his secretary's face, saying, in a somewhat languid tone—

"Were you ever in this part of the country before, de Brecy?"

"Never, your Highness," replied Jean Charost.

"You have met with an adventure in the wood, I hear," said the Duke, "and did not tell me of it."

"I did not think it right to intrude such subjects on your Highness," answered the young man. "Had anything led to it, I should have told you at once."

"Well, well," said the Duke, "you shall tell me hereafter." He then added, rather irritably "They have broken through my thoughts with these tales. I want you to do me a service."

"Your Highness has but to command," said Jean Charost.

"I am ill, de Brecy," resumed the Duke. "I feel more so than I ever did before—indeed, I have been rarely ill, and perhaps—but that matters not. Whatever be the cause, I have a strange feeling upon me—a sort of presentiment—that my life will not be very long extended. You heard the announcement that was made to me by man or shadow—I know not and care not which—in the convent of the Celestins. However, it is not that which has produced this impression, for I had forgotten it

within an hour; but I feel ill; and I see not why there should not be influences in external and invisible things, which, speaking to the ear of the soul, without a voice, announce the approach of great changes in our state of being, and warn us to prepare. Be that as it may, the feeling is strong upon me. I have ordered an Imperial Notary to be sent for, in order that I may make my will. In it I mean to show the world how I can treat my enemies—and my friends also; for I may show my forgetfulness of the injuries of the one, without failing in my gratitude to the other."

He leaned his head upon his hand for a moment or two, and then added—

"I long earnestly to see my wife. Yet, from causes that need not be mentioned, I do not wish to send her a long letter, telling her of my state, and of my feelings. I have therefore written a few lines, merely saying I am indisposed here at Beauté. I know that they will induce her to set out immediately from

Blois, where she now is; and it must be the task of the messenger to prepare her mind for the changes that she must, and the changes that she may, find here. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do, sir—fully," replied Jean Charost.

"I should wish him, also," said the Duke, "in case my own lips should not be able to speak the words, to tell her that, whatever may have been my faults, however passion, or vanity, or folly may have misled me, I have ever retained a deep and affectionate regard for her virtues, her tenderness, and her gentleness. I could say more—much more: I *will* say more, if ever I behold her again. But let her be assured that my last prayer shall be to call down the blessing of God upon her head, and entreat His protection for her and for our children."

While he spoke, he continued to hold a sealed letter in his hand, and gazed at Jean

Charost very earnestly. Nevertheless, he seemed to hesitate; and when he paused, he gazed down upon the paper, turning it round and round, without speaking, for several minutes. Then, however, as if he had at length decided, he looked up suddenly, saying—

"There is none I can send but Lomelini or yourself. Joigni is a rough brute, though bold and honest. Blaize has no heart, and very little understanding. Monluc would frighten her to death; for, were he to see me now, he would think me dead already. There is none but you or Lomelini, then. In some respects it were better to send him. He is of mature age, of much experience, accurate and skilful in his dealings, and passably honest—not without heart, either—affectionately attached to her, as well he may be, having been brought up and promoted by her father. But in him there is a world of Italian cunning, a great deal of cowardly timidity, and an all absorbing sense

of his own interests, the action of which we can never altogether count upon. Besides, she loves him not. I know it—I am sure of it, although she is too gentle to complain. He came hither as her servant. He found it more for his interest to be mine. She cannot love him. But enough of that. I have conceived a regard for you, de Brecy, and you will find proofs of it. It is not a small proof that I send you on this mission. There is something in the freshness of your character, and in the frankness of your nature, which will win confidence; and I wish you to set off at once for Blois. Bear this letter to the Duchess—tell her in what state I am; but kindly, gently; and accompany her back hither. What men will you want with you? The country is somewhat disturbed; but I do not think there is much danger."

"One who knows the way will suffice, my Lord," replied de Brecy. "A small party may pass more easily than a large one. I will only

beg a stout horse from your Highness's stables, which my man can lead, and which may both carry what we need by the way, and serve me in case of any accident to my own. I will undertake to deliver the letter, if I live to the end of the journey."

"Perhaps you are right in choosing small attendance," said the Duke. "I will send you a stout fellow to accompany you, who knows every inch of the road. He is but a courier; but he makes no bad man-at-arms in case of need; and, though I would not have you go fully armed, I think it were as well if you wore a *secret* beneath your ordinary dress."

"I have no arms of any kind with me, but my sword and dagger, sir," said Jean Charost; "and I do not think I shall need more."

"Yes, yes; you may," replied the Duke. "Stay, I will write a word to Lomelini. He will procure you all that is needful."

Drawing some paper towards him, the Duke wrote, with a hand which shook a good deal, the following words :—

"SIGNOR LOMELINI,

"Put Armand Chauvin under the orders of Monsieur de Brecy upon a journey which he has to take for me. Command the armourer to furnish him with whatever arms he may require, and the chief *ecuyer* to let him take from the stable what horses he may select, with the exception of grey Clisson, the Arab jennet, my own hackney, and my three *destriers*.

"ORLEANS."

"There," said the Duke, "there. Here is an order on the treasurer, too, for your expenses; and now, when will you set out?"

"In an hour," replied Jean Charost.

"Can you get ready so soon?" the Prince inquired.

"I think so, your Highness," replied the young secretary. "I shall be ready myself, if the two men are prepared."

"So be it, then," said the Duke of Orleans. "I will go lie down on my bed again; for I am weary in heart and limb."

CHAPTER XIV.

No season is without its beauty—no scene without its peculiar interest. If the great mountain, with its stony peak shooting up into the sky, has sublimity of one kind, the wide expanse of open country, moor, or heath, or desert, with its limitless horizon, and many shaded lines, has sublimity of another. To an eye and a heart alive to the impressions of the beautiful and the grand, something to charm or to elevate will be found in almost every aspect of Nature: the storm and the tempest, as well as

the sunshine and the calm, will afford some sources of pleasure; and, as the fading away of the green leaf in the autumn enchants the eye by the resplendent coloring produced, decay will be found to decorate, and ruin to embellish.

Take a wintry scene, for instance, with the whole country covered with a white mantle of snow, the trees and the forests raising themselves up brown and dim, the masses of dark pines and firs standing out, almost black, upon the light ground from which they rise, and the view extending far over a nearly level country, with here and there a rounded hill, rising detached and abruptly from the plain, perhaps unbroken in its monotonous line, perhaps crowned by the sharp angles and hard lines of fortress or town.

The description does not seem very inviting; but let us show how this scene varied during the course of the evening, as three travellers rode along at a quick pace, although their

horses seemed somewhat tired, and the distance they had journeyed had undoubtedly been considerable.

Towards three o'clock, a heavy grey cloud, apparently portending more snow, stretched over the greater part of the sky, cutting off the arch of the concave, and seeming like a flat canopy spread overhead. To the south-west, the heavens remained clear; and there the pall of cloud was fringed with gold, while, from underneath, streamed the horizontal light, catching upon, and brightening, the slopes, and throwing the dells into deeper shadows. The abrupt hills looked blue and grand, and raised their heads as if to support the heavy mass of grey above. Gradually, as the sun descended, that line of open sky became of a brighter and a brighter yellow. The dun canopy parted into masses, chequering the heavens with black and gold. The same warm hues were spread over every eminence ; and, as the sun descended farther still, a rosy light, glowing

brighter and brighter every instant, touched the snowy summits of the hills, flooded the plain, and, seeking out, in all its sinuosities, the course of the ice-covered river, flashed back from the glassy surface, as if a multitude of rubies had been scattered across the scene; while the grey wood, which fringed the distant sky, blazed with a ruddy brightness, pouring through the straggling branches, as if a vast fire were kindled on the plains beyond.

It was the last effort of the beauty-giving day; and those three travellers felt and enjoyed it in their several ways. The sun went down; the hills grew dark and blue; every eminence and even wave of the ground, appeared to rise higher to the eye; the greyness of twilight spread over all the scene: still, upon the verge of the sky, lingered the yellow light for full half an hour after day was actually done. Then, through the broken cloud, gleamed out the lustrous stars, like the brighter and the better hopes that come

sparkling from on high after the sunshine of this life is done, and when the clouds and vapors of the earth are scattering away.

Still the three rode on. An hour before, there had been visible, on the distant edge of the sky, a tall tower, like that of a cathedral, and one or two spires and steeples grouped around. These objects told them that a town was in that direction—the town to which they were bending their steps; but all was darkness now, and they saw it no more. The road was fair, however, and well tracked; and, though it had been intensely cold during the greater part of the day, the evening had become rather milder, as if a thaw were coming on. A light mist rose up from the ground as they entered the wood, not sufficient to obscure the way, but merely to throw a softening indistinctness over objects at any distance; and, as they issued forth from amongst the larger trees, upon a piece of swampy ground, covered with stunted willows, Jean Charost—for he was at the head

of the party—fancied he saw a light moving along at some little distance on the left.

"There is some one with a lantern," he said, turning to a stout man, who was riding beside him.

"*Feu follet*," replied the other. "We must not follow that, my lord, or we shall be up to our neck in a quagmire."

"Why, such exhalations are not common at this time of year, Chauvin," remarked the young man.

"Exhalations or no exhalations," rejoined the other, "they come at all times to mislead poor travellers. All I know is, that the short road to Pithiviers turns off a quarter of a league farther on."

"Exhalations!" echoed Martin Grille. "I never heard them called by that name before. Malignant spirits, they are generally said to be, who have lured many a man and horse to death. Don't follow this one sir—pray don't follow

it. That would be worse than the baby business."

Jean Charost laughed as he replied,

"I shall only follow the guidance of Monsieur Chauvin here. He will lead me better than any lantern. But it certainly does seem to me that the light moves on by our side. It cannot be more than two or three hundred yards' distance either."

"That's their trick, sir," said Chauvin. "They always move on, and seem quite near; but if you hunted them you would never come up with them, I can tell you. I did so once when I was a boy, and well nigh got drowned for my pains. Hark! I thought I heard some one calling. That's a new trick these devils have got I suppose, in our bad times."

All pulled up their horses, and listened; but, hearing nothing more, they rode on again, till, just as they were beginning to ascend a little rise, where the snow had been drifted off the

road, and the horses' hoofs rang clear upon the hard ground, a loud shout was heard on the left.

"Halloo! halloo! Who goes there?" cried a voice, some fifty or sixty yards distant. "Give us some help here. We have got into a quagmire, and know not which way to turn."

"For Heaven's sake, don't go, sir!" ejaculatede Martin Grille. "It's a new trick of the devil, depend upon it, as Monsieur Chauvin says!"

"Pooh, nonsense!" exclaimed Jean Charost; and then raising his voice, he said, "Who is it that calls?"

"What signifies that?" demanded a stern voice. "If you are Christians, come and help us. If you are not, jog on your way, and the devil seize you."

"Well, call again as we come," said Jean Charost, "to guide us to you; for there is no need of us getting into the quagmire, too."

"Let me go first, sir, and sound the way," said the courier.

"Halloo! halloo!" cried two or three voices as a signal; and, following the sound, Jean Charost and the courier, with Martin Grille a good way behind, proceeded slowly and cautiously towards the party of unfortunate travellers, till, at length, they could descry something like a group of men and horses amongst the willows, about twenty yards distant. It is true, some of the horses seemed to have no legs, or to be lying down; and one man was upon his feet, holding hard by a willow.

"Keep up—keep up! We are coming to you," vociferated Jean Charost. "It is firm enough here, if you could but reach us."

The guide, who was in advance, suddenly shouted—"Halt there!" and at the same moment his horse's fore feet began to sink in the ground.

"Here, catch my rein, Chauvin!" exclaimed the young secretary, springing to the ground. "I think I see a way to them."

"Take care, sir, take care!" cried the courier.

"No fear," answered Jean Charost; "from tree to tree must give one footing. There are some old roots too, rising above the level. Stay there, Chauvin, to guide us back."

Proceeding cautiously, trying the firmness of every step, and sometimes springing from tree to tree, he came within about six feet of the man whom he had seen dismounted; and, calling to him to give him his hand, he leaned forward as far as he could, holding firmly the ozier near which he stood, with his left arm. With this assistance, the stranger sprang across; but neither he nor his companions were willing to leave their horses behind them, and it was a matter of much more difficulty to extricate the beasts than the men; for some of them had sunk deep in the marsh, and seemed to have neither power or inclination to struggle. Nearly an hour was expended in efforts, some fruitless, and others successful, to get the ani-

mals out; but at length they were all rescued; and Jean Charost found his little party increased by six cavaliers in a somewhat woful plight.

The man whom he had first rescued, and who seemed the principal personage of the troop, thanked him for his assistance, but in a short, sharp, self-sufficient, tone which was not altogether the most agreeable.

"Where are you going, young man?" he asked at length, as they were re-mounting their horses.

"To Pithiviers," answered Jean Charost, as laconically.

"Then we will go with you," resumed the other, "and you shall guide us; for that is our destination too."

"That will depend upon whether your horses can keep up with mine," replied Jean Charost; "for I have spent more time here than I can well spare."

"We will see," returned the other, with a

laugh. "You have rendered us one service; we will try and make you render us another, and then thank you for both at the end of the journey."

"Very well," replied Jean Charost, and rode on.

The other kept by his side, however; for the tall and powerful horse which bore him, seemed none the worse for the accident which had happened. Armand Chauvin and Martin Grille followed close upon their young leader; and the other five strangers brought up the rear.

The rest of the journey, of well nigh two leagues, passed without accident; and the two foremost horsemen were gradually led into something like a general conversation, in which Jean Charost's new companion, though he could not be said to make himself agreeable, showed a great knowledge of the world, of life, of courts, and of foreign countries, and displayed rather rough, but keen and trenchant, wit,

which led his young fellow-traveller to the conclusion that he was no common man.

The last two miles of the journey were passed by moonlight; and Jean Charost had now an opportunity of distinguishing the personal appearance of his companion, which, perhaps, was more prepossessing than his speech. He was a man of the middle age, not very tall, but exceedingly broad across the chest and shoulders; and his face, without being handsome, had something fine and commanding in it. He rode his horse with more power than grace, managing him with an ease that seemed to leave the creature no will of his own; every movement, indeed, displayed extraordinary personal vigor, joined with some dignity. His dress seemed rich and costly, though the colours were not easily distinguished. But the short mantle, with the long furred sleeves hanging down almost to his horse's belly, betokened, at once, to a Frenchman of those days, the man of high degree.

Although the young secretary examined him certainly very closely, he did not return the scrutiny; but merely gave him a casual glance as the moonlight fell upon him, and then continued his conversation till they entered the town of Pithiviers.

"To what inn do we go, Chauvin?" asked Jean Charost, as they passed in amongst the houses. But, before the other could answer, the stranger exclaimed,

"Never mind—you shall come to my inn. I will entertain you, for to-night, at least. Indeed," he added, "there is but one inn in the place worthy of the name; and my people are in possession of it. We will find room for you and your men, however, and you shall sup with me—if you be noble, as I suppose."

"I am, sir," replied Jean Charost, following as the other led.

On entering the principal street, which was quiet and still enough, the stranger pulled up his horse, called one of his followers, and

spoke to him in a language which Jean Charost did not understand. Then, turning to the latter, he said,

"Let us dismount. Here is a shorter way to the inn, on foot. Your men can go on with mine."

Jean Charost hesitated; but, unwilling to show doubt, he sprang from his horse's back, after a moment's consideration, gave the rein to Martin Grille, and walked on with his companion up a very narrow street, which seemed to lead round the back of the buildings before which they had just been passing. The stranger walked slowly; and, as they advanced, he said,

"May I know your name, young gentleman?"

"Jean Charost de Brecy," replied the Duke's secretary; and, though he had a strong inclination, he refrained from inquiring in return the name of his companion. There was something about him, he could not well tell

what, that inspired respect—a reverence without love; and the young secretary did not venture to ask any questions.

A few moments after, a small house presented itself, built of stone, it is true, whereas the others had been principally composed of wood; but still it was far too small and mean in appearance to accord with the idea which Jean Charost had formed of the principal *auberge* of the good town of Pithiviers. At the door of this house, however, the elder gentleman stopped, as if about to enter. The door was opened almost at the same moment, as if on a preconcerted plan, and a man appeared with a torch in his hand.

Jean Charost hesitated, and held back; but the other turned, after ascending the three steps which led to the door, and looked round, saying,

"Come in. What are you afraid of?"

The least suspicion of fear has a great influence upon youth at all times; and Jean

Charost was, by no means, without the feelings of youth, although early misfortunes and early experience had rendered him, as I have before said, older than his years.

"I am not afraid of anything," he replied, following the stranger. "But this does not look like an inn."

"It is the back way," observed the other; "and you will soon find that it is the inn."

Thus saying, he walked on through a narrow passage, which soon led into a large court-yard. The man with the torch went before, and displayed, by the light he carried, a multitude of objects, which showed the young secretary that his companion had spoken nothing but the truth, and that they were, indeed, in the court-yard of one of those large and handsome *auberges*—very different from the *cabarets*, the *gites*, and the *repues*—all inns, of different classes, at that time in France.

Two or three times, as they went, different men, some in the garb of the retainers of a

noble house, dressed in gaudy colors, some in the common habiliments of the attendants of an inn, came from different parts of the court towards the man who carried the torch; but, as often, a slight movement of his hand caused them to fall back again from the path of those whom he was lighting.

Right in front, was a great entrance-door and a wide passage, from which a blaze of light streamed forth, showing a large number of people passing to and fro; but to the left was a flight of half-a-dozen stone steps leading to a smaller door, now closed. To it the torch-bearer advanced, opened it, and then drew back reverently to let those who followed enter. A single man, with a cap and plume, appeared at a little distance on the left, who opened the door of a small room into which the stranger entered, followed by his young companion. Jean Charost gave a rapid glance at the dress of the man who opened the door, and which was as visible as it would have been in

daylight, and perceived, embroidered in letters of gold upon his cap, just beneath the feather, the words "*Ich houd.*" They puzzled him; for, though he did not remember their meaning, he had some recollection of having heard that they formed the motto or rallying words of some great man, or some great faction.

The stranger advanced quietly to a chair, seated himself, turned to the person at the door who had given him admittance, and merely pronounced the word:

"Supper."

"For how—" said the attendant, in an inquiring tone; and it is probable that he was about to add the word: "many," with some title of reverence or respect; but the other stopped him at once, saying:

"For two. Speak with Monsieur D'Ipres, and take his orders. See they be obeyed exactly."

Then, turning to Jean Charost, he said, in a good-humoured tone:

"Sit, sit, my young friend. And now let me give you thanks. You rendered me a considerable service—not, perhaps, that it was as great as you imagine; for I should have got out somehow. These adventures always come to an end; and I have been in worse quagmires of various kinds than that. But you rendered me a considerable service, and, what is more to the purpose, you did it boldly, skilfully, and promptly. You pleased me, and during supper you shall tell me more about yourself. Perhaps *I* may serve *you*."

"I think not, sir," remarked Jean Charost; "for I desire no change in my condition at the present moment. As to myself, all that I have to say—all indeed that I intend to say—is, that my name, as I told you, is Jean Charost, Seigneur de Brecy; that my father fought and died in the service of his country; and that I am his only child; but still most happy to have rendered you any service, however inconsiderable."

The other listened in profound silence, with his eyes bent upon the table, and without the slightest variation of expression crossing his countenance.

"You talk well, young gentleman," he said, "and are discreet, I see. Do you happen to guess to whom you are speaking?"

"Not in the least," replied Jean Charost. "I can, indeed, easily judge, sir, that I am speaking to no ordinary man—to one accustomed to command and to be obeyed, who may be offended perhaps at my plain dealing, and think it want of reverence for his person that I speak not more respectfully. Such, however, is not the case; and assuredly I can in no degree divine who you are. You may be the King of Sicily, who, I have been told, is travelling in this direction. The Duke de Berri, I know you are not; for I have seen him very lately. I am inclined to think, from the description of his person, however, that you may be the Count of Saint Paul."

The other smiled gravely, and then rejoined:

"The first ten steps you take from this door, after supper, you will know; for the greatest folly any man commits, is, to believe that a secret will be kept which is known to more than one person. But for the next hour we will forget all such things. Make yourself at ease: frankness never displeases me: discretion, even against myself, always pleases me. Now let us talk of other matters. I have gained an appetite, by the way, and am wondering what they will give me for supper. I will bet you a link of this gold chain against that little ring upon your finger, that we have lark pies, and wine of Gatinois; for, on my life and soul! I know nothing else that Pithiviers is famous for—except blankets—odds my life! I forgot blankets, and this is not weather to forget them. Prythee, throw a log on the fire, boy, and let us make ourselves as warm as two old Flemish women

on Martinmas Eve.—But here comes the supper."

He was not right, however. It was the same attendant whom Jean Charost had before seen that now returned, and whispered a word or two in his lord's ear.

"Ha!" said the stranger, starting up. "Who is with her?—Our good friend?"

"No," replied the attendant. "He has gone on for a couple of days to Blois, and she has no one with her but a young lady and the varletry."

"Beseech her to come in, and partake our humble meal," cried the other, in a gay tone. "Tell her I have a young guest to sup with me, who will entertain her young companion while I do my *devoir* towards herself. But tell her we lay aside state, and that she condescends to sup with plain John of Valois. Ah! my young friend, you have it now, have you?" he continued, looking shrewdly at Jean Charost, who had fallen into a fit of thought. "Well,

well! Let no knowledge spoil merriment. We will be gay to-night, whatever comes to-morrow."

Almost as he spoke, the door was again thrown open, and fair Madame de Giac entered, followed by the young girl whom Jean Charost had seen at Juvisy.

CHAPTER XV.

Two servants—one an elderly, grave, and silent personage, with the air of knowing much and saying little, which is the proper characteristic of experienced serving-men—the other, a sharp, acute young valeton, with eyes full of meaning and fun, which seemed to read a running commentary upon all he heard and saw—waited upon the guests at supper. With simple good sense, Jean Charost took things as he found them, without enquiring into matters which did not immediately affect himself. Whatever

rank and station he might mentally assign to his entertainer, he merely treated him according to the station he had assumed himself with perfect politeness and respect, but with none of the subservient civility of a courtier.

Madame de Giac, upon her part, taking the hint which had been sent to her, at once cast off all restraint, more completely than Jean Charost thought quite becoming, especially in the presence of her young companion; but she noticed him personally with a gay smile and a nod of the head, and he saw that she spoke in a whisper afterwards with her entertainer. The young girl greeted him kindly likewise; and the meal passed in gay and lively talk, not unseasoned with a fully sufficient quantity of wine.

Now the wine of Gatinois has effects very like itself, of a light, sparkling, and exhilirating kind, not easily producing anything like drunkenness, but elevating gently and brightly, even in small portions. The effect is soon over,

it is true; but the consequences are not so unpleasant as those of beverages of a more heady quality; and the high spirits generated, are like the sparkling bubble, on the cup, soon gone, and leaving nothing but a calm behind them.

"How is our friend, Louis of Valois?" asked Madame de Giac, with a laugh, when the meal was nearly ended. "He was in unusually high spirits when we met you and him, Monsieur de Charost, at the Abbey of Juvisy."

"His spirits, madam, were like the cream upon your glass," replied Jean Charost, "too sparkling to last long. He has been very ill since."

"Ha!" exclaimed the entertainer, with a sudden start. "Ill!—has he been ill? Is he better?"

"I trust he is, sir," answered Jean Charost, rather drily. "Better, in some respects, he certainly is."

There was a something—perhaps we might call it an instinct—which led the young gentleman to believe that the tidings of the Duke's illness would not be altogether disagreeable to the personage who sat opposite to him; and, to say truth, he was unwilling to gratify him by any detailed account. The other, however, seeming not to interest himself very deeply in the matter, the topic was soon dropped; and Madame de Giac and the stranger continued talking together in an under tone, sometimes laughing gaily, sometimes conversing earnestly, but seeming almost to forget, in the freedom of their demeanour towards each other, the presence of the two younger people, who made up the party of four.

Between Jean Charost and his fair companion, the conversation, strange to say, was much graver than between their elders. It was, however, carried on in a low tone; and, in fact, the party was thus completely divided into two for some time.

"I wish I were out of this companionship," said the fair Agnes, at length. "Madame de Giac is far too wise a woman for me. Experience of the world, I suppose, must come; but I would fain have it come piece by piece, and not wholesale."

"Do you think it so evil a thing, then?" asked Jean Charost.

"I do not know," answered the girl, "and we are often afraid of what we do not know. Did you ever, before plunging into a stream or lake, stand hesitating, for a minute, on the bank, wishing you could tell how cold the water would be? Well, it is so with me, standing on the brink of the world into which I am destined to plunge. I am quite sure the waters thereof will not be as warm as my own heart; but I would fain know how cold they are—whether enough merely to refresh, or enough to chill, me."

We need not pursue the conversation on these themes farther. The meal concluded, and the

table was cleared. The entertainer said something in a low tone to his fair companion; and she answered, with a sort of coquettish manner,

"Not yet—not yet. Find something to amuse us for another hour. Have you no fool —no *jongleur*—no minstrel—nothing to wile away the time?"

"Faith, I came badly provided," replied the other, "not knowing what happy fortune was prepared for me on the road. But I will see, I will see what can be done. The people will bring us comfits, surely, and I will ask what the town can afford."

A few minutes after, the servants returned, as he expected, with some dried fruits, and wine of a higher quality; and the stranger asked a question or two, in a whisper, to one of the attendants, to which the other replied in the same tone.

"An astrologer!" echoed the stranger; "an astrologer! That will do admirably. We will

all have our fortunes told. Go for him quietly; and mind, betray no secrets. I hope every one here, as in duty-bound, has the hour, and day, and minute, of his or her birth by heart. Your God-fathers and God-mothers have failed sadly if they have neglected this essential point of information. For my own part, I have had my horoscope so often drawn, that if all the fortunes befal me which have been prognosticated, I shall need to live to the age of Methuselah, to get them all into one life, to say nothing of being killed five different times in five different manners."

Every one smiled, but none felt convinced that the speaker doubted the truth of the predictions at which he scoffed; for it was a habit in those times, as well as in most others, for men to pretend want of belief in that which they believed most firmly; and a trust in judicial astrology was almost as essential a point of faith, as a reliance in any of the many blessed virgins which were then scattered through the

various towns of Europe. On this occasion no one denied being furnished with all the dates for having his or her destiny accurately read by thestars; and only one person present showed any reluctance to hear the words of fate from the lips of the Astrologer. Strange to say, that one was the gay, bold, dashing Madame de Giac, who seemed actually fearful of learning the secrets of the future. In all hollow hearts there are dark recesses, the treasured things of which are watched over with miserly fear, lest any eye should see them and drive them to the light.

She objected in a sportive tone indeed, but with a wandering and timid look; sometimes pettishly declaring that she positively would not consent to have all the misfortunes of life displayed before her ere their time, and sometimes laughingly asserting that her noble lord hated astrologers, and that therefore she was bound to have nothing to do with them.

The conduct of their entertainer, however,

puzzled and surprised Jean Charost more than her reluctance. They were evidently friends of old date—perhaps something more; and during the whole evening he had been paying her every soft and tender attention with a gallantry somewhat too open and bare-faced. Now, however, he first laughed and jested with her, insisting, in gay and lively tones, but with his eye fixed upon her, keenly, and almost sternly; and then ceased all tone of entreaty, and used very unlover-like words of command. A reddish spot came into his cheek, too, and a dark frown upon his brow; and his last words were, as some steps sounded along the passage —"You must, and you shall," uttered in a low, hoarse voice which seemed to come from the very depth of his chest.

The next instant, the attendant entered with a man dressed in a very peculiar manner. He was small, mean-looking, aged, and miserably thin, with a beard as white as snow, but eyebrows as black as ink. All the features were

pinched and attenuated, and the shrivelled skin was pale and cadaverous; but the face was lighted up by a pair of quick, sharp, intensely black eyes, that ran like lightning over every object, and seemed to gain intelligence from all they saw. He wore a black gown, open in the front, but tied round the middle by a silver cord. His feet were bare and sandalled, and on his head he had a wide black cap, from the right side of which fell a sort of scarf crossing the right shoulder, and passing under the girdle on the left hip. A small dagger in a silver sheath, a triangle and a circle of the same metal, and an instrument, consisting of a tube with a glass at either end—the germ of the future telescope —hung in loops from his belt, and, with a large wallet, or *escarcelle*, completed his equipment.

On entering the room, the Astrologer saluted no one, and moved not his bonnet from his head, but advanced calmly into the midst of the little circle with an air which gave dignity even

to his small and insignificant figure; and, looking round from face to face, said in a sweet, but very piercing, voice—

"Here I am—what do you want with me?"

Very little reverence was in his tone; and Jean Charost's companion of the way replied, with an air of some haughtiness—

"Sir wise man, you do not know us, or you would wait to hear our pleasure. You shall learn what we want with you very speedily, however."

"Pardon, your Highness!" ejaculated the Astrologer. "I know you all. But your men might show more reverence to science, and not drag me like a culprit from my studies, even at the command of John, Duke of Burgundy."

"Ah, the fools have been prating," said the Duke, with a laugh.

But the Astrologer answered quickly,

"The stars have been prating, your Highness, though your men have held their peace.

Before you set foot in this town, I knew and told many persons that you would be here this day, that you would meet with an accident on the road, and be saved from it by the servant of an enemy. Ask, and satisfy yourself. There are people in this very house who heard me."

"The servant of an enemy!" repeated the Duke of Burgundy, thoughtfully, and rolling his eyes with a sort of suspicious glance towards Jean Charost. "The servant of an enemy! But, never mind that. We have eaten salt together."

"I said, not an enemy, but the servant of an enemy," rejoined the Astrologer. "You and he best know whether I am right or not."

"I think not," observed Jean Charost. "The Duke of Orleans has given his hand to his Highness of Burgundy; and he is not a man to play false with any one."

"Well spoken, good youth," rejoined the Duke. "I believe you from my heart."

Still, a frown was upon his brow; and, as if to conceal what he felt, he turned again to the Astrologer, bidding him commence his prediction.

"My Lord, the Duke," remarked the Astrologer, "the hour and moment of your nativity are well known to me. But it is very useless to repeat to you what others have told you before. Some little variation I might make, by more or less accurate observation of the stars; but the variation could but be small, and why should I repeat to you unpleasant truths? You will triumph over most of your enemies, and over many of your friends. You will be the arbiter of the fortunes of France, and affect the fate of England. You will make a great name, rather than a good one; and you will die a bloody death."

"That matters not," replied the Duke. "Every brave man would rather fall on the field of battle than die lingering in a sick chamber, like a hound in his kennel."

"I said not on the field of battle," observed the Astrologer. "That I will not undertake to say; and from the signs I do not think it."

"Well, well, it matters not," interposed the Duke, impatiently. "It is enough that I shall survive my enemies."

"Not all of them," said the Astrologer in a warning tone. "Not all of them!"

The Duke waved his hand for him to stop, and, pointing to Madame de Giac, exclaimed, with a somewhat rude and discourteous laugh—

"Here, tell this lady her destiny. She is frightened out of her wits at the thought of hearing it; but, by the Lord, I wish to hear it myself, for she has a strange art of linking the fate of other people to her own."

"She has indeed," rejoined the Astrologer.

"Methinks, when she was born," said the Duke, laughing, "Venus must have been in the house of Mars."

"Your Highness does not understand the science," said the Astrologer, drily. "Madam, might I ask the date of your nativity?"

In a faltering tone, Madame de Giac gave him the particulars he required; and he then took some written tables from his wallet, and examined them attentively.

"It is a fortunate destiny," he said, "to be loved by many—to retain their love—to succeed in most undertakings. Madam, be satisfied, and ask no more."

"Oh, I ask nothing," replied Madame de Giac. "'Twas but to please the Duke."

"But *I* must ask something," said the Duke; and, drawing the Astrologer aside, he whispered a question in his ear, while Madame de Giac's bright eyes were fixed upon them eagerly.

To whatever was the Duke's question, the Astrologer replied aloud—

"As much as she possibly can."

The fair lady sank back in her chair with a look of relief, though the answer might possibly bear two meanings.

The Duke's face was more cheerful, however, when he turned round; and, pointing to Madame de Gaic's young companion, he said—

"Come, let us have some happy prediction in *her* favor."

The Astrologer gazed at her with a look of much interest, and so earnestly that the color rose in her cheek, and a certain fluttering grace of expression passed over her countenance, which made it look, for the first time, to the eyes of Jean Charost, quite beautiful, foreshadowing what she was afterwards to become. She made no hesitation, however, in telling the day, hour, and minute of her birth; and the Astrologer consulted his tables—looked in her face—consulted his tables again; but still paused in silence, for a moment or two, though the Duke of Burgundy exclaimed more than once—

"Speak—speak!"

"My science is either wrong," the Astrologer said at length, "or thine is, indeed, an extraordinary destiny. Till nineteen years have passed over thy head, all is quiet and peaceful. Then come some influences, not malign, but threatening. Some evil will befal thee which would be ruinous to others; but thy star triumphs still, and rises out of the clouds of the seventh house in conjunction with Mars, also in the ascendant. From that hour, too, the destiny of France is united with thine own. Mighty monarchs and great warriors shall bow before thee. Queens shall seek thy counsel, and even those thou hast wronged shall cling to thee for aid and for support."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Agnes, stretching forth her beautiful hands, with a look and attitude of exquisite grace, "I will wrong no one. Tell me not that I will wrong any one. It is not in my nature; can it be in my destiny?"

"One wrong," replied the Astrologer, "repaired by many a noble act. But I see more still. France shall have cause to bless thee. A comet—a fiery comet—shoots forth across the sky, portending evil; but thy star rules it, and the evils fall upon the enemies of France. The comet disappears in fire, and thy star still shines out in the ascendent, bright, and calm, and triumphant to the end; but the end comes too soon—alas! too soon!"

"So be it," said the young girl, in a tranquil tone. "Life, I think, must be feeling. I would not outlive one joy, one power, one hope. So be it, I say. Death is not what I fear. But wrong—oh! I never will commit a wrong."

"Then, pretty maid, you will be more than mortal," said the Duke of Burgundy; "for we all of us do wrong sometimes, and often are obliged to do so, that great good may spring out of small evil."

Agnes was silent; and the Astrologer turned

to Jean Charost, who readily told him all he desired to know; for such was the general faith in judicial astrology at that time in France, that no man was left ignorant, by his parents, of the precise hour and minute of his birth, in order that the stars might be, at any time, consulted in case of need.

The Astrologer smiled kindly on him; but John of Burgundy asked, impatiently,

"What say you, man of the stars? Is this youth's fate any way connected with mine?"

"It is, Prince," replied the Astrologer. "It has been once. It shall be again. I find it written, that he shall save you from some danger: that he shall suffer for your acts: that he shall be faithful to all who trust him: that he shall be present at your death, and try, but try in vain, to save you."

"Good!" said the Duke, in a musing tone. "Good!" And then he added, in a lower voice, as if speaking to himself, "I will let him go, then."

The words reached Jean Charost's ears, and, for the first time, he comprehended that he had run some risk that night. Although rather inexperienced in the world, he was well aware that the caprices of princes, and of the favored of the earth, are not easy to be calculated; and he would have given a great deal to be out of that room, notwithstanding the pleasant evening he had spent therein. To show anything like alarm or haste, however, he knew well might frustrate his own purpose; and, affecting as much ease as possible, he conversed with his young companion and the Astrologer, while the Duke of Burgundy spoke a word or two, in a low tone, to Madame de Giac. What the treacherous woman suggested, might be difficult to tell exactly; but only a few moments had elapsed when the elder attendant, who had before appeared, re-entered the room, saying,

"This young gentleman's lacquey is im-

portunate to see him, and will take no denial."

Jean Charost instantly rose, saying,

"It is time then that I should humbly take my leave, your Highness. I knew not that it was so late."

"Nay; stay a while," said the Duke of Burgundy, with a very doubtful smile. "This fair lady tells me that you are an intimate of my cousin, the Duke of Orleans, and that it is probable you go upon some occasion of his. Good faith, you must tell me, before you depart, whither you go, and for what purpose."

"Your Highness will, I am sure, demand neither," replied Jean Charost. "Hospitality is a princely quality, but has its laws; and gratitude for small services becomes the Duke of Burgundy far too much for him either to detain or to interrogate a humble servant of his cousin, the Duke of Orleans. As for the lady's information, she makes a slight mistake.

I am his Highness's servant, not his intimate; and certainly her intimacy with him, if I may judge by all appearances, is greater than my own."

The Duke of Burgundy turned a quick and irritable glance upon Madame de Giac; but Jean Charost had made a great mistake. We never render ourselves any service by rendering a disservice to those whom another loves. It was a young man's error; but he well divined that the fair Marchioness had prompted the Duke to detain him; and, thinking to alarm her by a hint at what he had seen at Juvisy, he had gone beyond the proper limit, and made a dangerous enemy.

After he had spoken, the young secretary took a step towards the door; but the Duke of Burgundy's voice was instantly heard, saying, in a cold, stern, despotic tone—

"Not so fast, young man. Stay where you are, if you please."

Then, putting his hand upon his brow, he re-

mained musing for a moment, and said, still thoughtfully—

"We must know your errand."

"From me, never, sir," replied Jean Charost.

"Boy, you are bold," thundered the Duke, with his eyes flashing.

"I am so, your Highness," declared Jean Charost, in a voice perfectly firm, but with a respectful manner, "because I stand in the presence of a Prince bearing a high name. I know he has concluded treaties of friendship and alliance with my Royal master of Orleans; and I am confident that he will never even think of forcing from his kinsman's servant one word regarding his due and honorable service. You have heard what this good man has said, that I am faithful to those I serve. Were I your servant, I would sacrifice my life sooner than reveal to any other your secrets committed to my charge; and though, in truth, my business now is very simple, yet, as I have no per-

mission to reveal it, I will reveal it to no one. Nor do I believe you will ask me. Such I know would be the conduct of the Duke of Orleans towards you: such I am sure will be your conduct towards him."

"Fool! you are no judge of the conduct of princes," replied the Duke.

Then, for a moment or two, he remained silent, gnawing his lip, with his brow knit, and his eyes cast down.

A low, sweet voice, close by Jean Charost, whispered timidly—

"Do not enrage him. When too much crossed, he is furious."

"Well," said the Duke, at length, "I will not force you, young man. Doubtless, you are making a mystery where there is none; and by refusing to answer a very simple question, which any Prince might ask of another's messenger—especially," he added, with a grim smile, "where there is such love as between my cousin of Orleans and myself—you have

almost caused me to believe that there is some secret machination against me. Go your ways, however; and thank your good stars that sent you to help me out of the quagmire, or your ears might have been somewhat shorter before you left this room."

The young man's cheek glowed warmly, and his lip quivered; but the same sweet voice whispered—

"Answer not; but leave not the town to-night. Conceal yourself somewhere till day-light. You will be followed if you go."

Jean Charost took no apparent notice; but, bowing low to the Duke of Burgundy, who turned away his eyes with haughty coldness, and inclining his head to Madame de Giac, who looked full at him with her sweet serpent smile, he quitted the room with a calm, firm step, and the attendant closed the door behind him.

As soon as he was gone, the Duke exclaimed, with a low, bitter laugh—

"On my life, he lords it as if he were of the blood Royal."

"Honesty is better than Royal blood," said the stranger.

"How now, charlatan?" cried the Duke, turning fiercely upon him; but then, his thoughts flowing suddenly in a different direction, he gazed upon the young lady from beneath his bent brows, saying—

"What was it you whispered to him, fair maid?"

"Simply to be cautious, and not to enrage your Highness needlessly," replied Agnes, with the color slightly mounting in her cheek.

"By my faith, he needed such caution," rejoined the Prince; then, turning to the Astrologer, he asked—

"What was it you said about his being present at my death?"

"I said, sir, that in years to come," the Astrologer replied—"long years, I trust—that youth would be present at your death, and try to avert it."

Burgundy mused for a moment, and then muttered, with a low laugh—

"Well, it may be so; but tell us, good man, what foundation we have for faith in your predictions? Are you a man of note amongst your tribe?"

"Of no great note, sir," answered the Astrologer; "yet not altogether unknown, either. I was once Astrologer of the city of Tours; but they offended me there, and I left them. I am, however, one of the Astrologers of the Court of France—have my appointment in due form, and my salary of a hundred and twenty *livres*. This shows that I am no tyro in my art. But we trust not to any fame gained at the present. Our predictions extend over long years, and our renown is the sport of a thousand accidents. Men forget the former ere they are verified, or connect not the accomplishment with the announcement. Often, very often too, we have passed from the earth, and our names are hardly remembered, when the events we have prognosticated are fulfilled. I have told

you the truth, however, and you will find it so. When you do, remember me."

"Well, well," said the Duke, in his abrupt impatient manner; and then, turning to the attendant, he added—

"Take him away. Bid Monsieur de Villon give him four crowns of gold. Tell Peter, and Godet, and Jaillou, to get their horses ready. I have business for them. Then return to me. I shall rest early to-night, and would have the house kept quiet."

While the attendant conducted the Astrologer from the room, the Duke spoke, for a moment or two, in a low and familiar tone, with Madame de Giac; and, then resuming his stateliness, bowed courteously to her, but rather coldly to her companion, and, opening the door for them with his own hands, suffered them to pass out.

END OF VOL. I.